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*Breakfast with Mobutu:
Congo, the United States and the Cold War, 1964-
1981*

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Abstract

On the 25th November 1965 Colonel Joseph Désiré Mobutu staged a bloodless coup to take charge of the political turmoil in recently independent Congo and establish one of the most brutal and corrupt dictatorships in modern African history. This thesis explores the story of the American hand both in Mobutu's fortuitous rise and its subsequent sustenance of his regime in the name of its geostrategic Cold War agenda. Spanning the administrations of four presidents from Lyndon Johnson to Jimmy Carter, this study considers the effects of the American Mobutu alliance on Congo and how its relationship with the Congolese leader in turn shaped the American approach towards the wider region and, ultimately, defined its Cold War in Africa. The thesis begins with the CIA-organised mercenary suppression of the Simba rebellion from 1964 to 1965, before offering a detailed analysis of the American role in bringing Mobutu to the helm of Congolese politics and ensuring the survival of his initially tenuous grasp on power. Having consolidated his grip on Congo, subsequent chapters investigate the American role in the establishment of the Mobutist 'State Kleptocracy', the part played by the Kinshasa despot in defining the American stand in the Angolan Civil War and, despite the by now obvious shortcomings of its Congo alliance, the Carter administration's continued support for Mobutu when his regime was threatened by violent dissent once more. As such, this thesis aims to give a more comprehensive and detailed picture of the American Cold War alliance with Congo's profligate dictator from 1964 to 1981.

Breakfast with Mobutu: Congo, the United States and the Cold War, 1964- 1981

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Introduction

From the raids of the early Portuguese slave traders to King Leopold's abusive personal colonial fiefdom and beyond Mobutu's rapacious rule into the present; the history of foreign meddling in Congo¹ remains a grim but seldom told tale of human tragedy the dimensions of which have rarely been paralleled even in Africa's troubled past. Congo has consistently ranked as one of the front-runners on the Failed State Index in recent years.² Fifteen years of violence (including Congo's two wars in 1996-97 and 1998-2003 respectively) have killed some five million people with millions more displaced.³ Even today, the country is beset by corruption (the electoral fraud of the November 2011 election- only the second genuine national election since 1960- is but the most immediate example of this) while the population at large languishes in extreme poverty.⁴ Despite the official cessation of war some eight years ago, the abuses of local militias and the national army in the historically neglected Kivus in eastern Congo continue to include plunder, murder and extreme acts of sexual violence.

Contemporary analysts and political scientists commenting on the roots of today's seemingly perpetual crisis usually attribute the absence of a functioning state apparatus to the decay bequeathed by the Mobutu regime. These brief asides do not do justice, however, to the complex circumstances following Congolese independence that saw Mobutu rise to the helm of Congolese politics, create his peculiar version of a totalitarian state and amass a personal fortune estimated at some five billion dollars by the early 1990s against the backdrop of the Cold War superpower struggle in Africa.⁵

The odds were stacked against the successful development of an independent, prosperous and unified Congo even before the emergence of Mobutu as a political force. The arbitrary borders of the colonial era bequeathed a seemingly unworkable geography that has not been successfully mastered by democratic government into the present. The largest country by surface area in Sub-Saharan Africa, this vast territory of over two million square kilometres contains more than two-hundred-

¹ The territory under consideration has endured a number of labels from Leopold's 'Congo Free State', 'Belgian Congo', 'Republic of Congo' in 1960 to Mobutu's 'Zaire' and into today's 'Democratic Republic of Congo'. For the purposes here, simply 'Congo' will be used throughout (except when quoting directly from documents or secondary texts).

² www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/06/17/2011_failed_states_index_interactive_map_and_rankings

³ International Crisis Group, *No Stability in the Kivus*, Africa Report No. 165, 16th November 2010; Human Rights Watch, *Soldiers Who Rape, Commanders Who Condone* July 2009; United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Secretary General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, 12th May 2011; Lacaille, Guillaume & Paddon, Emily, *'Stabilising Congo' Forced Migration Policy Briefing* 8, December 2011 (Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford Department of International Development, University of Oxford)

⁴ www.cartercenter.org/news/publications/election_reports.html#drc

⁵ Paul Nugent, *Africa Since Independence* (Palgrave MacMillan; Basingstoke, 2004) p. 236

and-fifty ethnic groups divided by a similar number of languages and local dialects.⁶ Furthermore, with only a forty-five kilometre coastline, an essentially land locked treasure chest of copper, uranium, gold, tin, cobalt, tantalum and industrial diamonds has struggled with what development economists have termed the 'Resource Trap'.⁷ Added to this mix was the particularly brutal history of Western intervention. Three centuries of trans-Atlantic slave trading, the cruel chapter of the 'Bula Matari' exploitation under King Leopold II and the hasty and incomplete decolonisation from paternalistic Belgian colonial rule all contributed to Congo's troubles even before the Cold War intrigues that followed independence.⁸

On 23rd September 1960, Kwame Nkrumah heralded the 'momentous impact of Africa's awakening upon the modern world' at the United Nations General Assembly as sixteen former African colonies gained admission to the world body.⁹ 1960 was to be the 'Year of Africa' as these countries followed the Ghanaian example of three years earlier and finally gained independence from respective French, British and Belgian rule. With the notable exception of the Algerian War, the first tide of decolonisation was a relatively peaceful affair as the former colonists sought to accommodate the growing African nationalist clamour in the hope of protecting their substantial economic interests on the continent and retaining political influence, if indirectly, on their former charges. Soon, however, events in Congo would stain Nkrumah's optimistic pan-African dream as it became clear that both the old European order and the Cold War superpowers viewed this 'African awakening' as much as a danger to be managed as an opportunity to be exploited.¹⁰

The Belgian-abetted secession of the mineral rich Katanga province and the desperate pleas of Patrice Lumumba, Congo's ill-fated first Prime Minister, initially to the unresponsive United States and then to the Soviet Union for help in preserving Congo's territorial integrity and political sovereignty brought the Cold

⁶ Roughly the size of Spain, France, Germany, Norway and Sweden; Congo was the second largest country by surface area in Sub-Saharan Africa until the independence of Southern Sudan from Sudan in 2011.

⁷ Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion* (Oxford University Press, 2008)

⁸ 'Bula Matari' (or breaker of rocks) was the name given to the explorer Henry Morton Stanley, commissioned by Leopold II, for his cruel methods and soon became a synonym for the entire colonial state. Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost* (MacMillan, 1999); Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa, 1876-1912* (George Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991); H.M. Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent, Volume I & II* (Harper Brothers; New York, 1879)

⁹ Samuel Obeng, *Selected Speeches of Kwame Nkrumah* Vol. 1 (Afram Publications; Accra, 1979) pp.156-186

¹⁰ The African brands of socialism espoused by the likes of Guinea's Ahmed Sékou Touré, Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, Senegal's Léopold Sédar Senghor and Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah no doubt added to American unease. Steven Metz, 'American Attitudes Towards Decolonization in Africa' *Political Science Quarterly* Vo. 9. No. 33 (Autumn, 1984)

War to Africa in 1960. The intrigues surrounding Lumumba's murder, the American manipulations of Congo's first United Nations intervention and the superpower meddling in Congo's nascent politics of the first Congo crisis, that also saw the CIA make its initial contacts with Colonel Joseph Désiré Mobutu as he staged his first coup to briefly take control of the country and ensure the demise of his erstwhile ally Lumumba, have been well documented.¹¹

Some five years after independence, the Johnson administration backing Mobutu's second and permanent military coup saw a further development in what became America's first foray into rudimentary nation building in Congo, albeit on an ad-hoc and improvised basis. In contrast to the short-term manipulations of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations to ward off any Soviet gains in the immediate aftermath of Congo's independence, by 1965 the United States now actively shaped an alternative political path for Congo, even as the Soviets had withdrawn from this arena, to ensure the emergence and survival of a regime that both provided a modicum of stability in central Africa and placed Congo firmly in the American camp. As such, the very same sequence of events that was soon vaunted as a successful Cold War operation in Washington bequeathed one of Africa's most notorious and durable dictators onto Congo.

Enjoying American protection for much of his rule, Mobutu set about bankrupting his country as he amassed a personal fortune in a system that has since been evocatively dubbed Africa's 'State Kleptocracy'. The legacy for Congo is sadly apparent in a country that remains a chamber of horrors for much of its population. Even with regards to America's immediate Cold War objectives in Africa the pitfalls of a strategy that leant so heavily on Washington's Mobutu alliance were often visible already to contemporary American observers, however. As a result, the American hand in Mobutu's rise, how and why the survival of Congo's profligate dictator came to be so intimately tied to the interests of successive and very different Washington administrations from Lyndon Johnson to Jimmy Carter, the impact of this on Congo, on the American approach to Africa and, ultimately, on the broader Cold War is a story that requires more careful telling.

My own interest in Congo is both academic and personal. While completing my Masters at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in 2004, I

¹¹Kelly refers to an interview with Belgian Colonel Van de Walle to support the claim that Mobutu was already on the Belgian secret police (Sûreté) payroll from before independence. Sean Kelly, *America's Tyrant: The CIA and Mobutu of Zaire* (American University Press, 1993) pp. 10-11 R. Weissman, *American Foreign Policy in the Congo, 1960-64* (Cornell University Press; Ithaca & London, 1974); Madeleine Kalb, *The Congo Cables: The Cold War in Africa- from Eisenhower to Kennedy* (MacMillan; New York, 1982); Richard Mahoney, *JFK: Ordeal in Africa* (Oxford University Press, 1982)

had the opportunity to study under Piero Gleijeses and was instantly captivated by his rendition of Cold War forces conspiring in Africa and the Third World. His 'Conflicting Missions', detailing the Cuban confrontation with the United States in Africa, introduced me to the Cold War intrigues in newly independent Congo as well as giving me my first taste of a piece of meticulous multi-archival research whose focus went beyond the traditional US, Soviet and European dimensions.¹² Two years later, Arne Westad's seminal 'Global Cold War' further refined the debate by shifting the focus of scholarship towards the central role of the Third World in this global ideological and geostrategic superpower conflict.¹³ The explicit call for further research entailed in this study was a central motivation for my own project. Finally and a little less theoretically, my own travels to Congo have further fuelled my fascination with a country that is as blessed with natural beauty as it is laden with mineral resources and marred by human failing. While passing through the Kivus, I have experienced the exhilaration of sitting within touching distance of a family of some of the world's last remaining mountain gorillas in Virunga National Park, camped within breath-taking view of the erupting volcano of Mount Nyiragongo, and enjoyed lively exchanges (and the odd Primus- Congo's beer of choice) with my fellow Congolese passengers aboard the ferries of Lake Kivu. I was also introduced to victims of Congo's on going rape epidemic at the V-Day 'City of Joy' in Bukavu. As such, even from my own limited personal experience, Congo remains a tattered contradiction of awe-inspiring beauty and heart-wrenching tragedy in which much of the population continues to feel the after-tremors of the Mobutu-induced state collapse. My hankering to tell at least part of this story with more careful research into the American role in the creation and sustenance of the Mobutist regime during the Cold War was thus inspired and directed by the ground breaking works of Piero Gleijeses and O.A. Westad and further stoked by my own experiences of the wonders and calamities of Congo.

While research in this area remains patchy, this is not the first study of American Cold War interventions in Congo, of course. The existing literature can perhaps best be subdivided into four broad categories; detailed studies of America's Cold War Congo interventions, subchapters within broader surveys of American interventions in Africa, the economic determinist paradigm for US Congo policies and the Africanist approach to the American role in Congo. As such, it is worth

¹² Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Mission: Havana, Washington & Africa* (UNC Press; Chapel Hill, 2002)

¹³ O.A. Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Time* (Cambridge University Press; New York, 2005)

pausing briefly and considering the state of scholarship and where the following study falls within these fields.

Building on the earlier efforts of Stephen R. Weissmann, Madeleine Kalb's 'Congo Cables' and Richard Mahoney's 'JFK: Ordeal in Africa' remain necessary starting points for an understanding of the American approach to newly independent Congo in the 1960s.¹⁴ Largely based on American archives, these studies reveal valuable details of the American operations in Congo during the Eisenhower and Kennedy years. From the CIA plots to murder Patrice Lumumba to the manipulations of the UN Congo force and the backstage subversion of Kinshasa's nascent political scene, both these titles are primarily concerned with Washington decision making and the motivations driving US policy in Congo.¹⁵ Kalb's tendency to overemphasise the contrast between the conservative Eisenhower and the more liberal Kennedy and her willingness to ascribe American policy to Soviet expansionism in Africa should be treated with care. Indeed, Mahoney offers a more nuanced assessment of Kennedy's Africa strategy, swaying as it did between his recognition of the genuine nationalist forces at work in Africa and the more traditional containment impulse of his predecessors when political setbacks for the West threatened in Congo. The issues raised in these two useful analyses, however, have shaped the subsequent literature to a considerable extent. How far the United States was responding to a genuine Soviet threat, the relative emphasis given to the regional concerns of Washington's more liberal Africanists when faced with more traditional Cold War geo-strategic considerations, the importance attached to Africa and Congo within the context of other foreign policy crises around the globe and, ultimately, the efficacy of the American Congo strategy in achieving its aims are questions that have not lost their relevance also for the study undertaken here.

¹⁴ Weissman's earlier study makes a useful case for the shortcomings of American policies in Congo responding to an illusory Communist threat and failing to realize the liberal hopes of Africa. Drawing largely on unnamed interviews, his slightly polemic account is quickly surpassed in terms of relevance by the archival analyses of Kalb and Mahoney. Weissman (1974); Kalb (1982); Mahoney (1982)

¹⁵ In line with this focus on the first Congo crisis are even more specific studies of its various components. Ludo deWitte has produced the most definitive analysis of the murky events surrounding Lumumba's murder to conclude that Belgian and Congolese forces were ultimately behind the murder, while events would not have progressed as they did without American backing. de Witte, *The Assassination of Patrice Lumumba* (Verso; London & New York, 2001). John Kent gives an excellent analysis of the American manipulations of the first UN intervention, as well as pointing to the events surrounding Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld's fatal plane crash on route to negotiate with Katangan leaders in Ndola, Northern Rhodesia. Kent, *America, the UN and Decolonisation: Cold War in Congo* (Routledge, 2010). The memoirs of Hammarskjöld's on site director in Congo, Rajeshwar Dayal, and CIA Station Chief, Lawrence Devlin, add colour to this picture. Dayal, *Mission for Hammarskjöld: the Congo Crisis* (Oxford University Press; London, 1976); Devlin, *Chief of Station: Congo; A Memoir of 1960-67* (Perseus, New York, 2007)

Their narrow periodic focus on the Eisenhower and Kennedy years, while quite worthy studies in themselves, comes at a price for the unfolding Congo debate, however. All too often Washington's support of the Mobutu coup and the relationship that then developed with the Kinshasa despot is simply seen as a linear continuation of earlier policies and the successful conclusion of a half-decade long intervention in Congo to fend off Soviet advances in central Africa. Broader studies on American foreign policy in Africa such as Henry F. Jackson's 'From Congo to Soweto' and Peter J. Schraeder's 'United States Foreign Policy toward Africa' as such willingly take up this orthodoxy.¹⁶ Each of these explore the relative neglect of Africa amongst Washington policymakers and the dominance of perceived Cold War crises in provoking an American response and thus shaping the direction of policies taken. Their respective chapters on Congo, however, shed little new light on the nuances driving the Washington-Mobutu alliance. Similarly, the excellent analytical framework of Zaki Laidi's 'Superpowers in Africa', that charts the ebbs and flows of the Cold War rivalry according to the rhythms of African tensions and the interplay between internal and external dynamics that exacerbated the flashpoints on the continent, does not go much further with regards to Congo.¹⁷

The many essays on Congo within edited volumes on American foreign policy in Africa usually also fit into this pattern. The collections of Bender, Coleman and Sklar or René Lemarchand, for example, explore the efficacy of the Cold War dominated American approach towards Africa without going beyond this simple continuity in American policy.¹⁸ Crawford Young's essay in the former, for instance, is an excellent overview of twenty years of American support of the Mobutu regime in the name of stability while René Lemarchand's chapter in his own volume offers a more prescriptive enquiry into the shortcomings of this approach. Neither, however, explores the specific factors that set the American-Mobutu relationship apart within this broader thesis. Even the invaluable insights of Gleijeses and Westad mentioned earlier, casting new light on specific events with their use of Cuban and Soviet sources during the CIA sponsored mercenary operations of the 1960s and the Angola conflict of 1975-6, do not aim at a more detailed reading of the role of Washington's Mobutu alliance in shaping American policies.

¹⁶ Peter J. Schraeder, United States Foreign Policy Toward Africa: Incrementalism, Crisis and Change (Cambridge University Press, 1994); Henry F. Jackson, From Congo to Soweto: United States Foreign Policy Towards Africa Since 1960 (William Morrow & Co. Inc.; New York, 1982)

¹⁷ Zaki Laidi, Superpowers and Africa: Constraints of a Rivalry, 1960-1990 (University of Chicago Press, 1990)

¹⁸ Gerald J. Bender, James S. Coleman, Richard L. Sklar (eds.), African Crisis Areas and US Foreign Policy (University of California, Berkley; London and Los Angeles, 1985); René Lemarchand (ed.) American Policy in Southern Africa (University Press of America; New York & London, 1981)

The literature described thus far is not, of course, faulty in itself and much of the above make important contributions to our understanding of the American interventions into Congo. Indeed, many of these commentaries even point to Mobutu's ability to manipulate American Cold War paranoia to ensure continued support from successive Washington administrations. Crawford Young himself neatly encapsulates this argument as follows,

'Mobutu, meanwhile, turns the very weakness of the regime and decay of the state into assets for his own survival. These basic factors serve to foster credibility of the "Mobutu or Chaos" argument, which has- so far- always bought enough Western support in the face of any serious challenge to sustain the regime. By repressing, dividing, and co-opting potential opposition, the regime succeeds in preserving near total uncertainty abroad as to the shape of an alternative political formula, or how it might come into existence. This leave ample room for the diplomatic community- by instinct and training disposed to short-term risk aversion, to prefer a hopeless present to an unknowable future.'¹⁹

While this succinctly summarises an increasingly visible and formative dynamic in Congolese politics, the details behind this American emphasis on Mobutu's survival, Washington's willingness to rely on its Kinshasa alliance and the impact this had on both protagonists remain obscure. As such, previous studies that fall under the above categories, either casting events in such broad strokes or focusing too narrowly on very specific aspects of the story, fail to do justice to the peculiar nuances of the American-Mobutu relationship that shaped Congo and, to some extent, determined the course of American policy not just in this central African country but also more broadly towards the region.

Two notable exceptions to this periodic distinction look to address America's Mobutu dilemma more directly. Michael G. Schatzberg's 'Mobutu or Chaos' is an eminently readable overview of Washington's thirty-year relationship with Mobutu from 1960 to 1990.²⁰ As its title suggests, essentially a policy piece based on secondary sources, this survey makes a strong moral and strategic case against prevailing assumptions in Washington by appealing to American self-interest to drop its support of the Mobutu regime to avoid an eventual anti-American backlash

¹⁹ Crawford Young, *'The Zairian Crisis and American Foreign Policy'* in Bender, Coleman and Sklar (eds.) *African Crisis Areas and United States Foreign Policy* (University of California Press; London & Los Angeles, 1985)

²⁰ Michael G. Schatzberg, *Mobutu or Chaos: The United States and Zaire 1960-1990* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America ; Philadelphia, Pa : Foreign Policy Research Institute, 1991)

from the downtrodden Congolese population. As this account does not seek to uncover new material, it also comes up short in pointing to specific instances when the Mobutu alliance proved detrimental even to American contemporary Cold War aims during the period under review. Sean Kelly's 'America's Tyrant', on the other hand, looks to go further as it grapples with archival material to tell the story of the American hand in the Mobutu regime.²¹ As an exploration between the interplay between Washington and the Kinshasa despot in defining their respective policies, this study is a little disappointing, however, especially with regards to the Mobutu era. The actual establishment of Mobutu's 'tyranny' over Congo is not tackled until the tenth chapter of the book, the superficial treatment of Mobutu's role in shaping Kissinger's Angola venture relies primarily on secondary sources (and John Stockwell's account in particular) and Carter's part in the two Shaba wars is not considered at all.²² More importantly, and not doubt due to the material available when this book was published almost twenty years ago, Kelly does not do justice to the documentary record in the American archives even on the earlier period of Mobutu's coup and his subsequent consolidation of power. While these two books thus offer very readable overviews of America's Mobutu relationship, many of the details of the now declassified record remain to be unearthed.

Breaking with the common assumption in the above literature that Cold War geostrategic considerations were at the heart of Washington's Congo policies is the 'Economic determinist' school of thought. This alternative paradigm seeks to explain the American interventions through the superpower's economic interests in the region and is perhaps best split into two sub-groups; the 'structuralist' approach and the 'business interest' approach. The former is relatively easily dealt with as the suggestion that the American state was broadly acting in defence of its capitalist world vision is not particularly controversial with regards to Congo and is easily reconciled with the primacy of geostrategic thinking in Washington and the perceived need to counteract potential communist gains in Africa. Nevertheless, this view often places too much emphasis on the need to secure Congo's natural resources as driving government policy towards Congo. Gerhard Th. Mollin advances this explanation, for example, when he points to a 'working community between the American government and Brussels' high finance' as replacing more

²¹ Kelly, *America's Tyrant*

²² John Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story* (New York: Norton, 1978)

formal imperialism in Congo already from the Truman administration.²³ As will be seen, however, the actual historical record does not support such the narrow economic resource-driven explanation of American foreign policy in Congo offered here. Nor does such a mono-causal explanation satisfactorily account for the nuances in specific policies that emerged during the successive Washington administrations.

Here the 'business interest' approach offers a more adaptable, if equally theoretical, analytical framework. It's chief proponent, David N. Gibbs, looks to explore the role of competing private business agendas in influencing government policy. Using Congo as its case study, the thesis of his 'Political Economy of Third World Intervention', is fundamentally flawed, however. First of all, the reductionist claim that simply cites apparent business contacts of various administration insiders as reasons for the direction of particular policies does not stand up to scrutiny. It takes a considerable leap, for example, to attribute the direction of Eisenhower's Congo policies to the fact that Secretary of State Christian A. Herter had married into the Standard Oil family and that his son became an executive with Mobil Oil. This reveals the pitfalls of such an overly theoretical approach that contorts events to fit a particular model. As such, his analysis of the Mobutu era sees a simple continuity from Johnson's policies in support of the 1965 coup through to the very public ties of the Nixon White House with the Kinshasa despot. The awarding of the Tenke Fungurume copper concession to a mining consortium led by Maurice Templesman over its Belgian rival Union Minière de Haut Katanga (UMHK, the Belgian mining conglomerate created by Leopold II and Cecil Rhodes' Tanganyika Concessions in 1906) is thus portrayed as the outcome of a single government effort to advance the aims of influential American privateers. As such, Gibbs writes, 'The United States, it is argued, sought to reduce influence of Union Minière in the Congo in order to open investment opportunities for American businesses. The US government was in essence an instrument of American business.'²⁴ This fundamentally underestimates the importance of geostrategic Cold War factors in determining the Washington attitude towards Congo as much as it runs roughshod over the much more complex historical record. At no point does the paper trail left by successive administrations support claims for the primacy of such

²³ Gerhard Th. Mollin refers to an '*Arbeitsgemeinschaft zwischen Amerikanischer Regierung und Brüsseler Finanzkapital*' in his, *Die USA und der Kolonialismus; Amerika als Partner und Nachfolger der Belgischen Macht in Afrika, 1939-65* (Akademie Verlag; Berlin, 1996) p. 471

²⁴ David N. Gibbs, *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention: Mines, Money and US Policy in the Congo Crisis* (University of Chicago Press, 1991) p. 185

private business interests influencing Washington policy makers. As such, the research conducted here will go some way towards dispelling this view and the third chapter in particular takes on Gibbs's contentions more thoroughly.

Private business interests and economic factors should not be entirely discarded from an analysis of the Washington-Mobutu alliance during this period, of course. The studies of Benoit Verhaegan and Guy Gran each offer valuable insights into both the political economy of Congo itself and the role of Mobutu's foreign partners in contributing to its economic collapse in the 1970s.²⁵ In particular, Benoit Verhaegan's term 'technological imperialism' eloquently describes the willingness of Western firms (often with direct- or government-guaranteed financing) to feed Kinshasa's political elite's penchant for massive white elephant prestige projects without any regard for their long-term viability.²⁶ The American government's willingness to continue to subsidise Mobutu's fixation on sophisticated military hardware, even against the warnings of the IMF for much of the 1970s, also fits into this pattern of transactions conducted with a political elite without due concern for the economic impact on Congo. Acknowledging the role of these developments in contributing to the corruption and economic disintegration of Congo is very different to the assertion that private business interests defined the American policy towards the Mobutist state. In fact, the picture that emerges is a rather different one with the Congolese and American governments working together to court American businesses and harness the private sector to their own ends rather than the other way round. As such, the Washington role both in Mobutu's and the IMF's economic initiatives in Congo, the specific agendas pursued by American administrations within this and how this contributed to Congo's economic collapse form a recurring theme throughout this thesis.

Finally, the 'Africanist' approach to this chapter of Congolese history naturally shares a similar focus on Congo's internal dynamics. In this regard, the works of Thomas Turner, M. Crawford Young and Michael G. Schatzberg stand out as necessary accompaniments to any study of Congo.²⁷ Each of these explores the

²⁵ Benoit Verhaegan, *'Les Safaris Technologiques au Zaïre, 1970-80'* *Politique Africaine* (June, 1985); Guy Gran (eds.), *Zaire: The Political Economy of Underdevelopment* (Praeger; New York, 1979); Guy Gran (ed.), *Zaire: the Political Economy of Underdevelopment* (New York; Praeger, 1979); Also David J. Gould, *Bureaucratic Corruption and Underdevelopment in the Third World: the Case of Zaire* (Pergamon Press; New York, 1980)

²⁶ See also Crawford Young, *'The Zairian Crisis and American Foreign Policy'* in Bender, Coleman and Sklar (1985)

²⁷ M. Crawford Young & Thomas Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State* (University of Wisconsin, 1985); Michael G. Schatzberg, *Dialectics of Oppression in Zaire* (Indiana University Press; Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1988); For a more general survey see also, Georges Nzongola-Ntalja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History* (Zed Books; London & New York, 2002)

reincarnation of Leopold's exploitative colonial state in the guise of Mobutu's 'kleptocracy'. Young and Turner offer a lucid analysis of the establishment of Mobutu's dictatorship, its shortcomings in providing even a basic services to its citizens and the increasing collapse of the state from the mid-1970s. Schatzberg, by contrast, focuses more narrowly on the repressive apparatus at Mobutu's disposal based on his fieldwork in Lisala in Equateur province in the mid-1970s. While concentrating on the domestic machinations of the Congolese state, each of these analyses ascribes a degree of centrality to American backing in sustaining the defunct Mobutu regime. Schatzberg, for example, points to the continued IMF, World Bank and Western donors, as well as the sporadic Western military interventions, that allowed the bankrupt regime to grind on and 'demonstrate to Zaire's dispossessed that the state's leadership, if challenged, could call on powerful outside support.'²⁸ Furthermore, each of these studies concurs with the view that American policy towards Congo was essentially driven by Washington's Cold War preoccupations that ensured the self-reinforcing mantra, 'Mobutu or Chaos', prevailed as the centrepiece of American strategy. Ultimately, however, beyond their call for a more regionalist approach towards Congo in Washington, these fascinating studies of the Congolese state do not seek to explore the details of the American role in Congo as a story in itself.

To summarise, this brief overview reveals three relatively consistently upheld themes throughout the existing literature exploring the American relationship towards Congo during the Cold War. First of all, there is a common assumption that Africa was a low priority on the foreign policy agenda of successive Washington administrations, at least until the Angolan Civil War rekindled the Cold War on the continent in the mid 1970s. Secondly, the emphasis of past research placed on the early 1960s encourages the tendency to view the Mobutu era as a straightforward progression and conclusion of earlier policies, without giving due attention to the very specific peculiarities of this era. Finally, and directly related to this, is the inclination to view the American hand in Mobutu's coup and the relationship that subsequently unfolded as the successful culmination of a covert Cold War intervention that served immediate American interests, either strategic or economic depending on the emphasis of the studies, albeit with considerable cost to Congo. There is ample evidence, however, to suggest that, even within such a narrow geostrategic Cold War interpretation, the benefits of Washington's Mobutu alliance were extremely limited and ultimately undermined even immediate

²⁸ Schatzberg, *Dialectics of Oppression in Zaire* p. 141

American aims. This highlights the need for a closer examination of the American-Mobutu alliance, its impact not just on Congo but on the American approach towards Africa and its role within the broader Cold War.

As a result, this study explores the events in Congo and their contemporaneous interpretations that conspired to move successive Washington administrations to foster and sustain the Kinshasa regime from 1964 to 1981, as Joseph Désiré Mobutu evolved into an increasingly megalomaniac despot. Building on the detailed research of the earlier period in the immediate aftermath of Congo's independence, the following pages share the analysis that the American Cold War containment impulse, often reinforced by racist undertones, consistently trumped economic factors and a more Afrocentric reading of events in Congo in the approach of successive administrations from Presidents Johnson to Carter. A more detailed consideration suggests, however, that the Mobutu era that unfolded after his final American assisted coup d'état in November 1965 marked a qualitative departure in American policies towards the region with very specific consequences both for Congo and the United States. Most obviously, the Johnson administration's continued and escalated meddling in Congo took place against a new backdrop that was more or less devoid of an actual Soviet threat to the region. More than this, its instrumental hand in the Mobutu coup saw the United States for the first time embark on a rudimentary nation-building project in a newly independent African country. This somewhat uncomfortable new role nevertheless ensured that America displaced its Belgium and European allies as the principal influence on the emerging Kinshasa regime. It also marked a shifting attitude towards the region in Washington.

As has been noted, studies of American foreign policy most usually treat Africa as the ugly stepsister of Europe, the Middle East, South-East Asia and even Latin America in terms of strategic importance.²⁹ Challenging this assumption over Africa's lowly status on Washington's agenda, however, is the fact that successive administrations nevertheless felt the need to actively intervene in Congo to shape its domestic political landscape from the outset of its independence. This dichotomy between an apparent executive disinterest alongside a growing American role in events in Congo as they unfolded has a two-part explanation. First of all, while

²⁹ Terence Lyons, *'Keeping Africa off the Agenda'* in Warren I. Cohen and Nancy Benkopf Tucker (eds.) *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy, 1963-68* (Cambridge Uni Press, New York, 1994); Logevall and Preston's edited volume on the Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy in the 1970s does not even include a chapter on Africa; Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (eds.) *Nixon and the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (Oxford Uni. Press, 2008)

strategically any Soviet gains in Africa in the wake of its surge towards independence were viewed with considerable trepidation, Washington saw the continent as traditionally a European responsibility and looked to its NATO allies to fulfil their obligations there. A second reason, however, comes to the fore during the first years of the Johnson presidency. With its active support of the Mobutu coup in November 1965, Washington felt it had successfully mastered the most pressing African trouble spot with a low-cost covert operation that seemingly effectively precluded Soviet gains in Congo. The self-congratulatory backslapping that followed established Congo as a shining example of a successful covert operation and an efficient way of dealing with the region that was upheld by subsequent administrations. No doubt smarting from the Bay of Pigs and continued troubles in Vietnam, a more critical reading of this superficial engagement that simply co-opted a corrupt elite to serve perceived American Cold War interests was notably absent in the euphoria of the intelligence community that propagated this myth for years to come.

Establishing the Mobutu alliance as Washington's *modus operandi* towards Congo and the wider region had profound consequences. The devastating effects on this fractured central African state of the American sustenance of a corrupt dictator bent on the exploitation of his domain have been well documented and continue to haunt Congo into the present. Going beyond this, however, this study explores the extent to which the bleaker implications of American policies for Congo's stunted political, economic and social development were already apparent to contemporary American officials. Unfortunately, these issues never seemed to rank highly enough to actually affect a change of heart or direction in Washington during the entire period under review. Still more surprising and controversial, however, is the impact of the Washington line even on immediate American Cold War aims. As such, this thesis goes considerably further in exploring the degree to which the United States' partnership with Mobutu, and the Congolese leader's ability to manipulate his stalwart ally, actually shaped America's ill-conceived Africa strategy.

Time and again, through its intimate affiliation with the Mobutu regime, the United States was caught on the side of dictatorial oppression and reactionary neo-colonialism in the name of its greater Cold War designs, tarnishing America's standing in Africa and the emerging Third World. Moreover, viewing the Mobutu regime as an instrumental ally in containing perceived threats in the area not only permitted Washington's relative inattention towards the region until the mid 1970s but also ensured that subsequent American policies were based on extremely weak

foundations. Indeed, some ten years after Mobutu's Washington-backed coup, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger embarked on his calamitous Angola intervention that rekindled the Cold War in Africa. It was no coincidence that, when faced with the break up of the Portuguese empire in 1974, the much-vaunted architect of American foreign policy turned to Washington's old Congolese ally. Thus, the ill-fated Angola strategy that followed drew its inspiration from a breakfast meeting with Mobutu, from which this thesis takes its title. Moreover, a decade-long policy of unfettered support for the Kinshasa tyrant in the build up to the Angola war was self-reinforcing as Mobutu's survival became intimately tied to American prestige in the Third World, at least to the Cold War mind-set that prevailed in Washington, and ensured that his regime became increasingly difficult to abandon even in the aftermath of this debacle during the Carter years.

Drawing on American, European and African sources, this then is the story of Mobutu's emergence as the centrepiece of American strategy towards Congo and the wider region from the mid 1960s that haunted the two countries for over three decades. The mainstay of the story told on the following pages relies on extensive research in the American presidential archives from Lyndon Johnson to Jimmy Carter, as well as the CIA and State Department records available at the National Archives in Maryland. The Congolese government archives, unfortunately, remain largely fragmented with neither finding aids nor catalogues to assist the researcher. Due to complexities of conducting research in Kinshasa and the constraints of time and resources available for this project, an exploration of the Congolese government record (or as much of it as still exists) remains an omission in this study. This imbalance is offset to a degree through recourse to European and, where available, Ghanaian records to present alternative insights to the events under scrutiny.

The rich documentary record of the Lyndon Johnson library give a detailed picture of the American approach to Congo, the nature of the intelligence available, how this was interpreted and the policies this gave rise to during the 1960s. With Brussels still the most dominant foreign influence on Congo for much of this decade; the Belgian diplomatic archives further elucidate events in Congo and the interplay between Brussels and Washington. The British and West German records, on the other hand, often offer useful observations from quarters with less immediate interests to compliment this picture. Finally, the East German and Ghanaian archives each give insights with a very different perspective. The former illustrate both the fragmented and increasingly desperate nature of Congo's anti-

government forces, as well as documenting the reluctance of the Soviet bloc to involve itself once more in Congo. The latter serve as a useful measure of the genuine outrage that spread through Africa and much of the Third World over American policies in Congo and the abhorrence with which the Mobutu regime was initially viewed.

By the 1970s the governmental record is not quite as accessible. Both the Nixon and Ford presidential archives again serve as the basis for the third and fourth chapter respectively, having thus far received scant attention with regards to their specific Congo policies. Unfortunately, for the Carter years much of the State Department record (with the notable exception of the Anthony Lake, Warren Christopher and Edmund Muskie papers) remains classified but the White House briefs available at the Carter Library and the CIA reports available at the National Archives allow for an initial assessment of the American approach towards Congo during this period. Again this American archival focus is complimented with British and West German archives, particularly useful for the discussions amongst donors over extending Congolese debt following its economic collapse in the mid-1970s, while the East German archives continue to give insights into the line taken by the Eastern Bloc. Unfortunately, both the Ghanaian and the Belgian records for the 1970s had not been processed by the time of writing. With an increasingly active French role in support of the Mobutu regime, however, recourse to the French diplomatic record partially fills this gap for the 1970s. Finally, this international diplomatic history is complimented by a review of contemporary American newspapers and the published memoirs of various protagonists to flesh out details and add colour to the picture painted by the above record.

Picking up the thread from the valuable research of Madeleine Kalb and Richard Mahoney on the American role in newly independent Congo, the first chapter thus focuses on the initial approach of the Johnson administration towards the spread of further insurgencies in Congo in 1964. Despite the absence of any sinister Soviet involvement at this stage and the CIA's own reading of the spreading 'rebellion' as largely fuelled by parochial grievances, the United States felt compelled to act once more. The slightly incoherent policies that emerged were the hodgepodge product of an extremely active embassy in close cooperation with an all too energetic CIA presence and Washington's propensity to look to a Belgian lead in Congo. The result was a central American role in the formation of a white mercenary column, the return of the controversial figure of Moïse Tshombe, Katanga's former secessionist leader, to Kinshasa's political fold and a direct

military strike on Kisangani by Belgian para-Commando units airlifted in American planes.

As political infighting in Kinshasa continued, it was only with the Mobutu coup in November 1965 that Washington began to feel vindicated in its course. As such, the second chapter focuses on the American role in Mobutu's sudden rise to the helm of Kinshasa politics and its subsequent efforts to maintain and foster his initially tenuous grasp on power. Again, it was a series of short-term manipulations that saw Washington play a central role in the fortuitous rise of a leader whose commitment and ability were questioned even by the CIA's own intelligence assessments. Once in place, however, Washington saw an opportunity to cultivate a loyal and friendly force in central Africa and threw its whole-hearted support behind the Mobutu regime. Thus it was under the somewhat inattentive watch of President Johnson that the United States conceived its unfaltering Mobutu-alliance that both saw Belgium gradually displaced as the principle foreign influence on Kinshasa politics and coloured the American relationship with Africa throughout the subsequent years. Indeed, this strategy of securing a loyal elite in Congo in pursuit of its strategic Cold War aims, even in the absence of a direct Communist threat, constitutes a constant theme throughout the period under review.

With a return of relative calm following the turbulent 1960s, the Nixon years saw high expectations for Congo's future soon turn to despair as an increasingly self-confident Mobutu asserted his dominance and moulded Kinshasa politics to his own ends. The third chapter explores Congo's internal dynamics as seen through the contemporary American intelligence record, revealing a detailed and critical understanding of the growing pitfalls of Mobutu's regime and the burdens this imposed on ordinary Congolese citizens even at the time. Nevertheless, Mobutu received an untrammelled endorsement from his American counterpart as he willingly and ably presented himself as a perfect fit for the Nixon Doctrine's declared intent of cultivating and strengthening regional allies in the global fight against communism. Despite its own accurate intelligence and the warnings of an increasingly nervous International Monetary Fund (IMF), Nixon indulged Mobutu's lavish appetites by encouraging both his fixation on sophisticated military hardware as well proving a valuable link to American private investment into Congo. With regard to this latter point, this chapter also provides an autopsy of David N. Gibbs' flawed ideas of the primacy of American business interests in Washington's policy formulation. Finally, it was during this period that Mobutu made his first contacts with the giant of American foreign policy, Henry Kissinger.

Even before he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in the Paris negotiations that brought the Vietnam War to a close, controversy surrounded this Harvard academic (busying himself with triangular diplomacy with China and the Soviet Union, his role in engineering détente and his shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East) whose substantial diplomatic talents were at times overshadowed by his secretive and high-handed *modus operandi*.³⁰ Under Nixon, Kissinger eventually occupied simultaneously the dual functions of the presidential National Security Adviser and Secretary of State, in part illustrating the White House grip on foreign policy during the Nixon years. With the Watergate crisis finally ending the mutual jealousies and petty rivalries with Nixon, Kissinger dominated the diplomatic arena ever further during the Ford years. Indeed, nowhere was the Secretary of State's bulldozing style and penchant for back channels and personal diplomacy more visible than in his approach to the unfolding crisis in Angola following the collapse of the Portuguese empire and in his dealings with his own Africa Department. More than this, when it came to Africa it seems this grand strategist of American policy was devoid of a coherent and sustainable long-term vision.

The superpower confrontation in the Angolan civil war has, of course, received considerable scholarly attention.³¹ The fourth chapter, however, approaches the turmoil to Congo's southern border through the prism of America's Mobutu alliance. Kissinger himself remains unrepentant about his close partnership with Mobutu seeing it as a necessary, conventional and unremarkable by-product of the Cold War need for stability as he wrote, 'A succession of American administrations maintained a working relationship with Mobutu because none of them wanted to add turmoil in Central Africa to already excessive list of foreign crises.'³² A closer look at the now available record suggests considerably more as the Congolese leader assumed a central role in shaping American strategy. The defeat of American interests in Angola at the hands of the Soviet-Cuban backed MPLA (Popular Movement of Angola) thus not only demonstrates Mobutu's ability to manipulate even the grand strategist, Kissinger, to his own ends but also reveals the pitfalls of a

³⁰ For example: Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and the American Foreign Policy* (Oxford University Press, 2004); Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* (London, Verso Press, 2001); Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Harvard Uni Press, 2007); Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (London, Penguin, 2008); Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1999)

³¹ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*; Westad, *Global Cold War*; Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*; Laidi, *Superpowers and Africa*; Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation* (Brookings Institute; Washington, 1985); Shannon Butler, *Into the Storm: American Covert Involvement in the Angolan Civil War, 1974-1975* (PhD Thesis; University of Arizona, 2008)

³² Kissinger *Years of Renewal* pp. 944-5

decade-long American reliance on the very fallible Kinshasa dictator whose decaying state was of little use in furthering American aims.

Defeat in Angola brought Africa into sharp focus for the United States and made it a fertile battleground for further Cold War confrontations, with events on the Horn challenging Carter's avowed return to a more moral foreign policy. The Carter administration's first encounter with Africa was over renewed crisis in Congo, however, and the final chapter explores how, when faced with spreading turmoil in Katanga (then Shaba) province, the Carter administration reacted with a notably uniform and conventional Cold War response. True, constrained by a more critical Congress and public at large in the wake of Angola and the Senate's Church Committee Report detailing the CIA's past excesses, Carter was outspoken in his criticisms of the Mobutu regime's human rights transgressions.³³ Nevertheless, when the Kinshasa despot appeared threatened, Washington responded in familiar style and rushed to secure the recalcitrant dictator's survival.

The detailed studies of the first Congo crisis in the immediate aftermath of its independence have naturally defined the subsequent scholarship on American-Congolese relations during the Cold War. To view the renewed interventions under Johnson simply as the culmination of the earlier policies fails to adequately consider the shifting circumstances under which Washington was now operating. A familiar containment impulse continued to dominate the American approach even as the Soviet Union's interest had waned in the wake of the Lumumba tragedy and the CIA's dominance of Kinshasa's political scene. Just as the Soviet Union had seemingly turned its back on Congo, the United States now embarked upon a peculiar form of state building in the fledgling country. The Johnson administration throwing its weight behind the Mobutu coup and its sustenance of his regime was thus not simply the final act of the crisis sparked by Congolese independence but the beginning of a relationship with profound and singular consequences for the stunted development of Congo. More than this, Washington's subsequent increasing reliance on the Kinshasa despot not only shaped the American approach to Africa for much of this period but ultimately even dealt a severe blow to the immediate Cold War aims it was pursuing, and to which Mobutu's brand of stability was deemed a vital ingredient by successive administrations from Johnson to Carter.

³³ www.aarclibrary.org/publib/church/reports/ir/pdf/ChurchIR_3A_Congo

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Lyndon B. Johnson Faces Congo

Lyndon Johnson oversaw the enactment of the Civil Rights Act on 2nd July 1964 to outlaw major forms of racial discrimination and segregation in the United States. The following months, as he cast half an eye towards Africa, the president approved the furnishing of a white mercenary brigade, predominantly from South Africa and Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia), to quash an indigenous uprising in eastern Congo and mounted a direct military intervention on Kisangani (then Stanleyville) in allegiance with Belgium, Congo's former colonial masters. For all his political acumen in the domestic arena, Johnson singularly failed to appreciate the negative implications of these Congo policies for American relations with the region. Much has been written about Lyndon Johnson as the domestic reformer who viewed foreign policy as an unwelcome distraction or, as Eric Goldman put it, 'something you had, like measles, and got over with as quickly as possible.'³⁴ Perhaps H.W. Brandt offers a more balanced picture in his assessment that, 'Johnson sought, with singular success, to change America's direction in matters touching minorities, the poor, and the otherwise disadvantaged. He made almost no effort to change America's direction in international affairs, even when change was necessary.'³⁵ This foreign policy conservatism rings particularly true for the Congo policies pursued under Johnson, marred by an incoherence that reflected a degree of executive inattention. Even as the Gulf of Tonkin incident saw a steady escalation of the Vietnam War, the Johnson administration was caught in a dilemma of wanting to influence events in Congo while at the same time remaining wary of being drawn into another costly Third World conflict.

Despite the efforts of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations to influence, harangue and shape the newly independent Congolese government, by the time Lyndon Johnson inherited the presidency turmoil was once more on the horizon or, as one intelligence memorandum cynically noted, 'the Congo seems destined for continued crisis.'³⁶ Both Washington and the American mission on the ground in Congo concurred in their analysis of the spreading unrest as largely 'tribal' in nature and parochial in motivation. Nevertheless, the United States once again sprang into action to intervene in Congo not only with an ever increasing

³⁴ Eric Goldman, *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson* (Dell Publishing, New York, 1969) pp. 447-448; H.W. Brands (ed.) *The Foreign Policies of Lyndon Johnson: Beyond Vietnam* (Texas A&M University, College Station, 1999); Terence Lyons, 'Keeping Africa off the Agenda' in Warren I. Cohen and Nancy Benkopf Tucker (eds.) *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy, 1963-68* (Cambridge Uni Press, New York, 1994)

³⁵ H.W. Brands, *The Wage of Globalism: Lyndon Johnson and the Limits of American Power* (Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 28

³⁶ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Directorate of Intelligence, Memorandum: 'The Political Situation and Prospects in the Congo', 20th February 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

Military Assistance Program (MAP) to the Kinshasa (Leopoldville until 1966) government and further meddling in Congolese politics that ultimately facilitated the return of the controversial Moïse Tshombé (Katanga's former secessionist leader) as Prime Minister, but also with the introduction of white mercenaries and in providing airlift capabilities for a direct Belgian military intervention in Kisangani. This flurry of activity from Washington and its allies left little room for the diplomatic initiatives of Africa's emerging leaders and the nascent Organisation of African Unity (OAU), however, and its efforts to facilitate a political settlement to Congo's troubles were either ignored or bulldozed.

At the heart of the American approach lay the continued deep-rooted Cold War myopia that interpreted events in Congo in terms of potential Soviet opportunities, while looking to the old Africa hands of Europe to carry the security burden there. Rather than the apparent Soviet disinterest in Congo during the 1964 rebellions prompting Washington to reassess its stance towards Africa, under Johnson a willingness to defer to Belgium in the events that followed and the readiness to engage white mercenaries in their joint cause to steady the central authority in Kinshasa stood in stark contrast to Kennedy's more delicate handling of the American image in Africa. As an appraisal of the Ghanaian government archives and the palpable outrage of Kwame Nkrumah indicate, this renewed foray into Congolese affairs during Johnson's first year in office dealt the American standing in Africa a severe blow as it found itself on the side of Africa's reactionary elements and Congo's former colonial rulers. Paradoxically, it was only with the Kisangani intervention that the communist powers took note of the popular outrage that spread through Africa and began once more to assist the rebels, with Cuba even sending troops to rally to their cause. This may not have proved sufficient to swing the military tide in favour of the insurgents but it did reveal deep pitfalls in the Johnson administration's early response to Congo.

A lack of a decisive executive leadership ensured that the United States responded to renewed crisis in Congo in 1964 with a mix of policies that at times simply followed the recommendations of an extremely active embassy and CIA presence on the ground and more often took its lead from its Belgian partners at this early stage. As such, this chapter essentially divides into three parts; the nature of the growing unrest threatening Congolese stability as it was interpreted by American intelligence assessments, how this in turn translated into actual policy in Washington followed by a discussion of the broader implications of these policies. While there was no immediate communist involvement in the events that unfolded

in Congo in 1964, the Cold War remained the central preoccupation behind the emerging American approach that was simply unwilling to allow the Congolese to work out their own political destiny. Keen to shore up the central government but devoid of a central vision for Africa, Washington's willingness to follow a Belgian lead once more placed the United States in the reactionary camp as Africa's struggle for independence continued.

Rebellion in Congo:

The disunity that had marred its independence in 1960 continued to haunt Congo even after the end of the Katangan secession and the return to a semblance of parliamentary politics in Kinshasa. By the end of 1963 various forces were competing to assert their interests and make their mark on the country's future. The central government of Prime Minister Cyrille Adoula, the moderate labour leader whose electoral success had been secured by the CIA's baksheesh in 1961, and President Joseph Kasavubu, the Abako Party leader of the 1950s independence movement, had only a tenuous grip on Congo's vast interior. Waiting in the wings of the flimsy Kinshasa government was the 'Binza Group'. Named after a quarter in the capital and consisting of Minister of Justice Justin Bomboko, the head of the security services (Sûreté) Victor Nendanka and the army's (ANC) Chief of Staff Joseph Désiré Mobutu; the Binza cohorts were reputed for their backstage manoeuvres in Kinshasa politics and ties to the CIA. Opposing these groups cultivated by the American presence in Congo since independence were the disenfranchised Lumumbist politicians exiled across the Congo River in Brazzaville plotting their return to Congo's political fold. At the same time, rural uprisings in the more disparate and neglected provinces of Congo threatened to unhinge any central political authority. As such, this first section examines the nature of the spreading turmoil and how American perceptions of these events provoked renewed western intervention in Congolese affairs in the first year of Johnson's presidency.

By the latter half of 1963 insurgency was spreading in the western province of Kwilu under Pierre Mulele, Lumumba's former Minister of Education who had undergone some rudimentary training in Beijing and was most often cited as an example of an ideologically driven leader.³⁷ While this rural uprising, having failed to capture any major towns, was fizzling out already by April 1964, Mulele's rebel bands continued to operate throughout that year. The 'Simba' rebellion in the Kivu

³⁷ M. Crawford Young, *'The Congo Rebellion' Africa Report*, 10:4 (April, 1965)

area ('Simba' meaning 'lion' in Kiswahili), loosely organised by the rural commanders 'General' Nicholas Olenga and Gastion Soumialot, posed a more sustained threat to the central government's hold on the country, as the towns of Uvira and Kalemie (formerly Albertville) fell in June and the rebels fanned out across Nord-Katanga. At the same time, in October 1963 opposition politicians formed the Conseil National de Libération (CNL) under the loose leadership of the likes of Antoine Gizenga and Christophe Gbenye (both former members of the splintered Movement Nationale Congolais- MNC/Lumumba) in Brazzaville. Lacking unity and driven more by personal ambitions than any formal ideological program, they were essentially disparate groups, split along the lines of the two leaders mentioned, who would later seek to at least nominally harness the rural uprisings in eastern Congo.³⁸ While the Sûreté easily dealt with the coup-style tactics of the CNL in Kinshasa itself, the central government proved singularly incapable in quashing the provincial Simba uprisings that continued to spread throughout 1964, not least to its own internal weaknesses.

As American embassy officials were painfully aware already at the beginning of 1964, the Congolese government lacked both the popular legitimacy and military strength to counter these waves of unrest. Having come to power with a little behind the scene help from his US allies two years earlier, the premiership of Cyril Adoula failed to inspire.³⁹ As a CIA report in February pointed out, 'Like Spanish moss, the present Congo government has its roots in the air not the Congolese hinterland.'⁴⁰ More than simply lacking support, however, the central and provincial administrations were haunted as much by their own political infighting as by their apparent inability to effectively govern. American ambassador Edward Gullion conveyed his efforts to intervene in the political wrangling in Kwilu province and from May the US embassy reported growing animosity between Adoula and Kasavubu amidst the mounting rebellion. Gullion summarised the situation shortly before the end of his tenure in Congo, '... corrupt and inefficient local governments and smouldering tribal antagonism ripen opportunity for revolt'.⁴¹ Nor was the political wrangling to get any easier either, with national elections and a

³⁸ For an excellent discussion of these leaders see an article written already in 1965: M. Crawford Young, *'The Congo Rebellion'* Africa Report, 10:4 (April, 1965); also Benoit Verhaegen, Rebellions au Congo, Vol. I & II (Brussels: Centre de Recherches et D'Information Socio-Politiques; CRISP, 1966)

³⁹ Richard Mahoney describes US behind the scenes maneuvering, bribes and the threat of a coup to ensure Adoula's election in JFK: Ordeal in Africa p. 38

⁴⁰ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Directorate of Intelligence, Memorandum: 'The Political Situation and Prospects in the Congo', 20th February 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, Lyndon Johnson Library, Austin, Texas (hereafter LBJL)

⁴¹ Gullion, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, February 4 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

referendum on a new constitution scheduled for June.

This political incompetence was more than matched by the dismal performance of the Congolese National Army (ANC). Formerly the brutal instrument of colonial repression as the Force Publique, the ANC continued to be 'noted for its pillaging and raping' and was 'hated and feared', according to one CIA report.⁴² Perhaps even more concerning from an American perspective, the Congolese army failed to offer any serious resistance to the 'Simba' rebels, despite usually being better armed and equipped. A hint of racist scorn coloured National Security Council staffer William H. (Bill) Brubeck's commentary to the President, 'Well armed troops are being routed by pygmies carrying spears and machetes'.⁴³ The CIA concurred, '...the ANC unaided would probably be unable to contain additional disturbances elsewhere even on a modest scale.'⁴⁴ Undisciplined, lacking in leadership and its loyalty by no means certain, the ANC often simply abandoned its posts and weapons to the rebels. Again, this situation was further exacerbated by the June 30th deadline for the departure of UN troops. As a result, throughout the first half of 1964 it became increasingly clear that Congo was slipping further into rebellion and chaos. What is far from obvious, however, is why this was once more deemed worthy of Washington's attention and interference? As such, before considering the American response to events in Congo, Washington's assessment of the rebellion itself should briefly be examined.

The Cold War prism undoubtedly coloured any contemporary western analysis of events in the Congo. Even in his recently published memoirs, for example, CIA Station Chief Larry Devlin concludes with the self-satisfied assertion, 'I thoroughly enjoyed my tours of duty in the Congo. It was a tough tiring time, but accomplishing American objectives and contributing to the defeat of the Soviet Union made it worth while.'⁴⁵ There was indeed some communist involvement. Much was made, for example, of Pierre Mulele's apparent ties to the Chinese. Thus, Governor W. Averell Harriman, the Ambassador at large known as the War Horse for his hard line approach to the Cold War, cabled Kinshasa on July 7, 1964, 'All evidence here leads to firm belief that Mulele, if not communist, is Peking-trained and

⁴² CIA, Intelligence Memorandum: 'Security Situation in the Congo', 12th June 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁴³ Brubeck, 'Memorandum for the President', 15th June 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁴⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, Intelligence Memorandum: 'Security Situation in the Congo', 17th June 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁴⁵ Devlin remains one of the most controversial figures in Congolese history, not least due to his alleged complicity in the murder of Lumumba and his return to Congo as an emissary of the Templesman mining group. Larry Devlin, *Chief of Station, Congo* (Public Affairs Perseus Books, New York, 2007) p. 267

undoubtedly susceptible communist, particularly CHICOM, discipline and control.’⁴⁶ Much of the language used in the communications between Kinshasa and Washington reflected this Cold War mindset with frequent references to the ‘rabid and leftist’ movement.⁴⁷ Even the UN chimed in pointing to ‘overwhelming evidence’ of involvement in the Kivu uprising of Chinese communists operating from Burundi and the West German embassy reported the swelling Chinese embassies in Bujumbura and Brazzaville with more than a hint of suspicion.⁴⁸ There was also the suggestion that the rebels were receiving arms from external sources as ambassador G. McMurtrie Godley, the former Deputy Chief of Mission during the Lumumba years who replaced Gullion in 1964, wrote of the rebels, ‘that they appear to be armed with something more than bows and arrows.’⁴⁹

Beyond these rhetorical assertions, however, it is difficult to make the connection between rebel objectives and the super-power rivalry of the Cold War and even American observers noted the absence of any direct Soviet involvement in Congo’s troubles at this early stage. Reports emanating from East German (GDR) embassies in Prague and Moscow certainly suggest that the Soviet Union and its allies kept the rebel cause at a safe distance and did not comply with CNL calls for material assistance.⁵⁰ Indeed, as early as September 1964 a report of a conversation between East German and Russian officials at the GDR embassy in the United Arab Republic (UAR) demonstrate that the Soviets and their allies were well aware of the dissent amongst the various rebel factions, and between the CNL and the newly created Kisangani revolutionary government in particular.⁵¹ Put off by their internal squabbling and having burned their fingers in 1960, the Soviets were wary of Congo and the Chinese also kept a safe distance in the early months of 1964. More to the point, a CIA report that May illustrates that the US was well aware of their super power rival’s reticence and never at any point during this early but formative period was there any hard evidence given of active communist involvement in the

⁴⁶ Harriman to Embassy Kinshasa, 7th July 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJK

⁴⁷ Gullion, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 4th February 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁴⁸ Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State (reporting on conversation between DCM Blake and the UN’s Osario Tafall); Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL;

German Ambassador Hermann Huber, Kinshasa to Auswärtigesamt, Berlin, ‘Lage im Kongo’, 30th August 1964; Band 500, Kongo Leopoldville 1964, B34, Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Federal Republic of Germany (hereafter BRD)

⁴⁹ Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁵⁰ Gespräche mit der Vertretung der Kongolesischen Freiheitsbewegung in Bamoko, Conakry, Dares Salaam, Havana, Moskau, Prag, 1963-64; 1966-68; Abteilung Ost und Zentralafrika, Sektor Zentralafrika, Mikrofiche C791/74, MfAA, Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Deutsche Demokratische Republik (hereafter DDR)

⁵¹ Gespräche mit der Vertretung der Kongolesischen Freiheitsbewegung in der Botschaft in Kairo, 1963-67; Abteilung Ost und Zentralafrika, Sektor Zentralafrika, Mikrofiche 790, MfAA, DDR

rebellion.⁵² Even Harriman had to admit that the, 'Congolese left is characterised more by incompetence rather than strong connections to communists.'⁵³ In other words, even the most hard-nosed Cold War warriors in the State Department grasped the fact that both the Chinese and the Soviets were keeping the rebels at arms length, wary of their motivations and doubtful of their abilities.

Rather than a communist orchestrated plot to gain a foothold in Africa, all shared the view of the Simba rebels as a rag-tag and disorganised grass roots movement, responding to local discontent and never more than nominally controlled by the likes of Soumialot and Olenga on the ground, with only loose ties to political leaders such as Gizenga and Gbenye. In contrast to Mulele, Soumialot and Olenga appeared little more than able organisers who combined tactical shrewdness with ruthless brutality to give the rural uprising a semblance of direction.⁵⁴ The CIA, the American embassy in Kinshasa and their Belgian counterparts agreed in their assessment of the rebellion as largely tribal in nature and resulting from a general dissatisfaction with the, 'corruption of GOC officials, incompetence, maladministration, plus brutality of ANC in dealing with villagers.'⁵⁵ An intelligence memorandum passed to the president on the 16th June detailed the dire situation in most areas of the country, 'The causes of the security crisis are many, but basic to them is the widespread dissatisfaction of the people with their governments- national, provincial and local. These governments are corrupt and incompetent.' It went on to describe how local corruption siphoned off the salaries of low-level civil servants, poor infrastructure prevented farmers from marketing their produce, the social services of pre-independence days were rarely available and rampant inflation made life increasingly unaffordable- the food price index, at 100 in 1959, had risen to 239 by November 1963 and to 425 the following June.⁵⁶ The picture of the rebellion clearly painted by intelligence reports and the correspondence between the State Department, Kinshasa and Brussels is one of a popular uprising essentially without any sophisticated ideology, central cohesion or

⁵² CIA Special Report, Office of Current Intelligence, 'Exile Activity Against Leopoldville' 22nd May 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁵³ Harriman to Embassy, Kinshasa, 4th July 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁵⁴ M. Crawford Young, 'The Congo Rebellion' *Africa Report*, 10:4 (April, 1965)

⁵⁵ 'Ambassador MacArthur, Brussels to Secretary of State (reporting the views of Belgian Foreign Office Official Davignon), 9th June 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL; The 'Direction d'Administration des Affaires Congolaises et du Rwanda-Burundi' in Brussels noted that Belgian Foreign Minister Spaak was less inclined to view the rebellion in Cold War terms than his American counterparts (*M. Spaak est d'autre part moins enclin que les Américains à imputer la rébellion à un complot communiste*). J. de Bassompierre, 'Weekly Report, 5th-9th September 1964; Direction d'Administration des Affaires Congolaises et du Rwanda-Burundi' (hereafter Weekly Reports); File 18517-4, Congo, January to September 1964, Belgian Diplomatic Archives, Brussels (hereafter BDA)

⁵⁶ CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, Memorandum: 'Security Situation in the Congo', 12th June 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

significant external influence.

Why, then, did such an uprising send warning signals to Washington and demand US intervention? Any suggestion that the US was involving itself on altruistic humanitarian grounds can easily be dismissed. As has been seen, successive Washington administrations since Congo's independence had no qualms over offering assistance to the ANC despite its known track record of atrocities. Some commentators, on the other hand, have pointed to the rich and strategically vital resources of Congo, from copper and tin to cobalt and industrial diamonds, as the primary motivation behind all American actions there.⁵⁷ Certainly, the Belgian focus towards its former colony appears to have been coloured primarily by economic considerations and its effort to retain its stranglehold on Congolese resources.⁵⁸ Indeed, in 1965 UMHK, represented no less than sixty per cent of Congo's entire exports.⁵⁹ The pitfalls of this reductionist explanation of the American position will be developed further later (chapter three) but there is no evidence that the US was concerned with securing either resources or contracts for US firms during the Johnson years. When economic considerations are mentioned in the American reports, they are incidental and intended to give an indication of the overall situation in the country.⁶⁰ At no point, however, is there any hint in any of the reports and correspondences of an American plot to secure economic gains for either the US government or private businesses.

In fact, the Cold War remained at the forefront of Washington's Congo deliberations. Refracted through this paradigm, there was no contradiction between the apparent indigenous nature of a rebellion, borne out of local discontent, and the fear of an imminent communist coup spreading from Congo to

⁵⁷ According to Henry J. Tasca, the US obtained $\frac{3}{4}$ of its cobalt and $\frac{1}{2}$ of its tantalum from Katanga in 1959, Henry F. Jackson, *From the Congo to Soweto* p. 22; Gibbs, *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention*

⁵⁸ Both the Adoula and Tshombe government were dependent on financial and technical advisors and the Belgian government viewed with alarm any efforts to change these arrangements. Furthermore, much of the weekly reports emanating from Brussels throughout 1964 were concerned with the 'Contentieux Agreement' designed to maintain Belgian and Union Minière de Haut Katanga's (UMHK) dominance over the Congolese economy through negotiations over Congolese debt. File 18517- 4, Congo, January to September 1964, BDA

⁵⁹ David Renton, David Seddon and Leo Zeilig, *The Congo: Plunder and Resistance* (Zed Books, London & New York, 2007) pp. 120-21

⁶⁰ Ambassador Gullion warned in February 1964 of the possible impact of the Kwilu uprising on production of the Lever plantation in the North-West of Kikwit and the blocking of copper shipments on the Kasai River due to rebel activity, Gullion to Secretary of State, 4th February 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

Two CIA situation reports mention the Congolese economy, and the foreign companies operating there, continuing largely unaffected and summarising the nature of Belgian economic interests in the Congo in February and June respectively. Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, Memorandum: 'The Political Situation and Prospects in the Congo', 20th February 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

engulf sub-Saharan Africa. The CIA, the State Department and the embassy in Kinshasa were well aware that neither the Soviets nor the Chinese were significantly involved in the Congolese rebellion but this did nothing to alleviate their fears. This is because it was not merely the actions of the Communists themselves that were feared, but what they could or might do if certain conditions prevailed. Thus, while reporting that the Soviet Union and Chinese had turned down assisting the Brazzaville exiles on the one hand, in the very same assessment the CIA continued to assume the worst, 'Peiping- and Moscow as well- **presumably** is assessing the CNL's future. It **probably** wants to be ready to step in quickly with an offer of substantial aid if the CNL shows any real capability' [emphasis added].⁶¹ Similarly, when one of the major towns in the Kivu area was under threat in May, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Henry J. Tasca, cabled Kinshasa warning against allowing the 'situation in Bukavu to continue to deteriorate, providing golden **opportunity** for external intervention from Burundi and points east'⁶²[emphasis added]. In other words, at this stage in the initial months of the Johnson administration, the fight in Congo was not against the Cold War rival itself but one against the conditions in which communist subversion could flourish. If chaos prevailed the Soviets might re-enter the scene. If the rebels succeed they may be recognised or receive arms from the Eastern Bloc.

This constituted a notable qualitative departure from earlier US entanglements. Eisenhower's much-discussed showdown with Patrice Lumumba was a response to a perceived direct and imminent threat. Real or imagined, the policies of the Eisenhower administration were a consequence of the fear that Lumumba would eject Western interests from Congo and open it up to Soviet influence. As Eisenhower himself exclaimed in an NSC meeting in 1960, 'We are talking of one man forcing us out of the Congo'.⁶³ While this may have been a warped misreading of the intelligence at hand, there is little doubt that the administration in Washington felt an urgent need to counter what they saw as an impending communist coup. In early 1964, however, such a threat was not apparent. Indeed, Godley pointed out in a telegram that May, 'Also we do not believe that this time danger of Russian/US confrontation is as great as it was in 1960...'⁶⁴ It was not that American strategic interests were immediately threatened or Congo was on the

⁶¹ CIA Special Report, Office of Current Intelligence, 'Exile Activity Against Leopoldville' 22nd May 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁶² Tasca to Godley, Kinshasa, 31st May 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁶³ Cited in Mahoney, *Ordeal in Africa* p. 41

⁶⁴ Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 29th May 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

verge of communist subversion. Much rather, the assumption that chaos left untreated would allow the Soviet Union and its allies to penetrate Congo compelled the Johnson administration into action. In strategic terms, this was a questionable shift to control the internal mechanics of a state in order to pre-empt, rather than prevent, the seeds of Soviet control. In other words, while well aware that the Soviet bloc had turned its back on Congo and that Congo's troubles were largely the result of localised popular discontent in 1964, no one within the Johnson administration apparently recognised this as an opportune moment to formulate a new approach towards Congo and Africa at large that went beyond the immediate concerns of the superpower rivalry. Much rather, the globalist Cold War paradigm continued to define the American Congo approach from the outset of the Johnson years and it remains to be seen how this translated into policy.

'No One Fights American Brigades': White Mercenaries and the Kisangani Intervention

When surveying its options in early 1964, the Johnson administration was grappling with the dilemma of balancing its anxiety over inaction with its fear of overly committing in Congo. Perhaps the logical response to counter a largely 'tribal' rebellion fuelled by local discontent would be to improve the material conditions in the areas of concern. Indeed, this was precisely Godley's prescription for dealing with the disaffected areas in the Kivus and Kwilu, 'Best way to do so is by an active and effective civil operations program which will bring some material well being to effected areas but more importantly give them better administration and govt.'⁶⁵ As Godley mentioned in this cable, however, pressures to this effect were frustrated by the political infighting and resulting inertia of the Congolese government. Furthermore, with the outbreak of further violence and open rebellion, from a US perspective a military problem demanded a military solution. Despite having analysed the material root causes of the rebellion, the Belgian suggestion of negotiating with the rebels and the exiled CNL was out of the question for Godley, 'Surely our experience here and elsewhere in the world has conclusively demonstrated that negotiating with communists or communist backed politicians from position of weakness is mistake.'⁶⁶ Washington concurred and was determined for the rebels to be defeated in the field, as the Belgian ambassador

⁶⁵ Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 8th June, 1964, LBJL- NSF- Country File- Africa- Congo- Box 81

⁶⁶ Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 13th June 1964, LBJL- NSF- Country File- Africa- Congo- Box 81

summarised, 'De l'avis des Américains, une solution politique nécessite la restauration d'un minimum d'ordre et d'autorité de la part des dirigeants de Leo.'⁶⁷

As such, Washington continued to escalate its own military assistance program (MAP). With ever increasing rumblings in Vietnam and a presidential election scheduled for November, however, the US was not prepared to commit its own troops and frantically searched for an ally to carry the burden in its stead. Beyond this, as the Adoula administration continued to falter under popular illegitimacy and internal squabbling, the United States took refuge in clandestine king making and was intimately involved in the return to Congolese politics of Moïse Tshombe; the erstwhile Katangan secessionist reviled amongst African nationalists for his collaboration with Belgium in the independence aftermath, his recourse to white mercenaries in this crisis and his close ties to the Portuguese colonists and the South African white minority regime. These political developments also led to a further military escalation as the CIA assisted in the formation and furnishing of a white mercenary column. Finally, faced with the devastating combination of the American supplied air power and the mercenary onslaught, the insurgents turned on the local white population. This in turn prompted the only direct military intervention during the Simba rebellion as the United States airlifted Belgian paratroopers to strike Kisangani, ostensibly in a humanitarian effort to rescue white hostages. As a result, each of these elements of the evolving United States policy marked a gradual escalation of American commitments in Congo.

President Johnson had inherited a substantial military aid program to Congo in the form of equipment, funds and even US fighter planes flown by Cuban exiles from the Kennedy administration. As disorder spread, however, this was soon deemed insufficient. The correspondence between Washington and Kinshasa reveals that the embassy took the lead to a large extent in pushing for increased military aid. Thus on February 4th and 8th Ambassador Gullion cabled Washington with requests for military training teams (MTTs) and a tentative list of equipment needed.⁶⁸ Washington was not slow to respond. On February 20th an earlier proposal drafted by the Joint Chief of Staffs (JCS) to equip one parachute-, two commando and one infantry- battalion, as well as deploying seventeen MTTS consisting of a total of thirty-one officers and seventy-four US regular troops, was approved by the

⁶⁷ Belgian Ambassador Marcel- Henri Jaspar, Paris to Brussels; Telegram No. 267; File 18517- 4 - Congo- January to September 1964, BDA

⁶⁸ Gullion, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 8th February 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

president. According to a CIA intelligence memorandum, by June there were seventy US military personnel deployed with more on their way.⁶⁹ Similarly, when Kinshasa passed on Premier Adoula's panicked request for US fighter planes and crews to stave off the complete collapse of the ANC in the Kivu area on the 23rd May, the State Department's response was immediate and positive.⁷⁰ Three C-130 turboprop and six T-28 fighter planes arrived with an eight-man crew and nine-man technical support team on the 27th May.⁷¹ As a result, largely under the urging of the Kinshasa embassy, the United States had significantly increased its military commitment to Congo.

Nor did America stop short at this. At all times, the United States went to great lengths to stress the limited nature of its involvement, that it was merely assisting in the training of legitimate government forces and that the planes were on loan to the Congolese government, flown by non-US nationals also under contract. That this was a little disingenuous must have been clear even to close observers at the time. If nothing else, America was supplying the planes on the one hand and financing the costs of loaning them and their Cuban-exile pilots under its Military Assistance Program on the other. As a New York Times article that November pointed out, 'Through a technical-assistance agreement the United States is also financing the Congolese air force. The Pilots are Cuban mercenaries. Some, ominously, are veterans of the Bay of Pigs.'⁷² Nevertheless, the official US line was that no Americans would be involved in operational activities. This was clearly communicated to the president in a memo on June 16th that went on to confirm the delivery of a further six T-28 and ten T-47 planes and six helicopters, 'to be flown by Belgians and contract personnel with no US military involvement.'⁷³

Two incidents, however, suggest that the American involvement went beyond the strictly non-operational on occasion. After the press had picked up a story on US involvement in combat flying in Congo, Bill Brubeck sent an explanatory note to the President on June 20th detailing the involvement of two US 'civilians' overseeing the FAC's (Congolese Air Force) use of US planes and contract pilots, 'They were under certain restriction but did do some reconnaissance and combat missions in the Kwilu in Spring, but were subsequently ordered to do no more combat missions.'

⁶⁹ CIA, Current Intelligence Memorandum, 'Security Situation in the Congo', June 12th 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁷⁰ Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 23rd May 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁷¹ Harriman, Washington to Embassy, Kinshasa, 24th May 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁷² Lloyd Garrison, 'White Mercenaries on a "Rabbit Hunt"' New York Times (November 15, 1964) p. 89

⁷³ Brubeck, Memorandum for the President, June 15 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

Despite these directives, faced with the imminent collapse of the ANC and Adoula's demands for US support at the end of May, it seems the American mission in Congo took the unilateral and unauthorised decision to allow the US 'civilians' to fly combat missions to stave off the rebels in Kivu. Bill Brubeck confirmed exactly this without any hint of criticism,

'The two Americans were under heavy local pressure during the past two weeks, however, to fly combat in the Eastern Congo crisis as the only pilots already trained to fly the T-28s. They did so, and their contribution was probably decisive in temporarily saving the Kivu. It would be hard to second guess the decision now by hindsight.'⁷⁴

Similarly, the evidence suggests that US officers at times served as more than just technical advisors. This is clearly borne out by a cable from Godley in May discussing the possibility of and need for increased foreign troops in Congo, 'Proof of pudding is highly effective discreet advice Col. Dodds has been giving in Bukavu... Intend to keep at least one competent US army officer available as Matheron's (US Consul in Bukavu) "technical advisor" but who in reality will be there to help stiffen Congolese backbone.'⁷⁵ The implications of both these incidents are clear. Without waiting for approval from Washington, the US mission on the ground in Congo was at times quite prepared to use the resources at its disposal and stretch the US mandate beyond what had formally been approved. More to the point, Washington was well aware of this and made no objection. These means were not deemed sufficient to stem the tide of unrest spreading through the country, however, and the Johnson administration desperately sought a willing partner to more actively intervene in Congo.

The most obvious port of call was NATO ally and Congo's former colonial masters Belgium. As such, already in February Secretary of State Dean Rusk sought to pressure his Belgian counterpart, Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak, as he framed a direct appeal in the most cogent Cold War terms,

'From where I sit, trying to look at our various responsibilities for free world defence in several parts of the globe, I am impressed both with the potential dangers of communist breakthrough in the Congo and with the special responsibility which Belgium, because of its historical affiliation with the Congo

⁷⁴ Brubeck, 'Memorandum for the President: 'American Pilots in the Congo', June 20 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁷⁵ 'Cable from Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 31st May 1964, LBJL- NSF- Country File- Africa- Congo- Box 81

has to shore up that particular front.’⁷⁶

The American view was that Belgium had both a moral responsibility and a material interest (in the form of 3.5 billion dollar stake in the Congolese economy) to clean up the mess in Congo, and calls to this effect from the State Department and US Ambassador MacArthur in Brussels intensified throughout May and June.⁷⁷ To be sure, Belgium continued to be involved in Congo beyond simply tending to its financial interests in the form of training and technical support of the ANC and the police force. One hundred Belgium officers and a training camp in Kitona served to this effect.⁷⁸ Indeed, by the end of June MacArthur reported that Belgium was proving more responsive to consistent American prodding, having provided crews for the US-supplied C-47 planes and helicopters.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, from an American standpoint this was simply not enough and the sense of frustration in the correspondence between the Brussels embassy and Washington was palpable. While Belgium kept troops at the ready to protect its own material interests, the Belgian government was not prepared to consider the recruitment of Belgian officers into active service in the ANC at Battalion level, as was the American suggestion.

Nor was this mere ‘dilatatory foot dragging’, as MacArthur suggested.⁸⁰ Secretary Spaak was well aware of the international backlash against the first Belgian intervention in Katanga immediately after independence and wished to avoid a similar spectacle. At the same time, he voiced concern over Belgian officers being associated with the known brutality of the ANC and a possible backlash against Belgian civilians dispersed throughout Congo.⁸¹ Finally, as unwilling as the Belgians were to send officers to join the ranks of the ANC at this stage; Mobutu, Adoula and Kasavubu were no more keen to have them for fear of the negative political consequences of permitting the return of the former colonial masters. Similarly, despite the close relations between US officials and UN Special Representative Osario-Tafall, the frantic US efforts to ensure an extension of the UNOC mission beyond the June 30th deadline, and the continued presence of General Ironsi’s

⁷⁶ Rusk, Washington to Spaak, Belgium’, 10th February 1964, LBJL- NSC- Country File- Africa- Congo- Box 81

⁷⁷ CIA Special Report (Office of Current Intelligence), ‘Belgium’s Continuing Problems with the Congo’ LBJL- NSF- Country File- Africa- Congo- Box 81

⁷⁸ MacArthur, Brussels to Washington’, 15th February 1964, LBJL- NSF- Country File- Africa- Congo- Box 81

⁷⁹ MacArthur, Brussels to Washington’, 23rd June 1964, LBJL- NSF- Country File- Africa- Congo- Box 81

⁸⁰ MacArthur, Brussels to Secretary of State, 11th February, 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁸¹ The weekly reports throughout 1964 stress the fear of the Belgian government of becoming associated with the ANC resulting in reprisals against Belgian nationals in rebel held territory; File 18517- 4, Congo January to September 1964, BDA

Nigerian troops, came to nothing. America's European allies were also unwilling to assume a more active role in Congo. The Italians were supplying a number of T-6 training aircraft and helping to train the Congolese Air Force (FAC) and Israel had offered to train a battalion of Para-commandos, but Europe could not be pushed beyond this.⁸²

Perhaps a more ready source of assistance could be found among Africa's regional protagonists. Even before the Simba rebellion had mounted its first attack, President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, one of the founding fathers of African nationalism and pan-Africanism, voiced his concerns over the fate of Congo following the withdrawal of UN troops on June 30th 1964.⁸³ In late 1963 and early 1964, Nkrumah wrote a series of letters to Prime Minister Adoula, President Kasavubu and even United Nations Secretary General U-Thant appealing for an 'All African Force under the provisions of the Addis Ababa Charter' to replace United Nations Operations in Congo (UNOC) 'for the sake of the African people and in the interest of world peace.'⁸⁴ Unfortunately, this opportunity to resolve the growing turmoil in Congo through the Organisation of African Union (OAU), and by extension strengthening this fledgling organisation within a year of its inception, was never fully explored. Certainly the United States appealed to Nigeria, Tunisia and Ethiopia for a continued troop presence after June 30th, but these plans were shelved at least as much due to Congolese resistance to such an idea as due to the reluctance of the countries in question.

On the one hand, as the Ghanaian Ambassador in Leopoldville pointed out, Congolese politicians were wary of African troops for fear that they would not prove loyal when faced with popular uprisings in rural Congo.⁸⁵ More than this, however, reports from the US and Ghanaian embassies concur that it was primarily the loss of face of having the ANC shored up by other African contingents that moved Adoula, Kasavubu as well as Mobutu and his Binza cohorts to vehemently oppose such a move.⁸⁶ Perhaps the uncertainties inherent in transferring responsibility of resolving the Congo crisis to an African organisation that may not be as malleable to the American position as the United Nations had proved in the

⁸² Godley, Kinshasa to Washington, 29th February 1964, LBJL- NSF- Country File- Africa- Congo- Box 81

⁸³ David Birmingham, *Kwame Nkrumah; The Father of African Nationalism* (Ohio University Press, 1990)

⁸⁴ Open Letter from President Kwame Nkrumah to Premier Adoula (copied to all OAU leaders), 24th March 1964; RG-17-2-207, Political Relations with Congo 1/3/63-14/1/65, Public Records of and Archives Administration, Accra Ghana (hereafter PRAAD)

⁸⁵ Ambassador J.K.F. Quashie, Ghanaian Embassy, Kinshasa to Principal Secretary of African Affairs Dei Anang, Accra, 27th February 1964; RG17-2-232, Political Reports from Leopoldville, 1964, PRAAD

⁸⁶ Ibid.

post-independence crisis also prevented Washington from exploring Nkrumah's suggestions more fully or exerting greater pressure on Congo's political elite towards such a goal. Thus, a regional approach remained an untried theory and the United States effort to find a willing successor to relieve the withdrawing UNOC force and shoulder the burden of direct military action in Congo came to nothing. Furthermore, the difficulties of the ANC in maintaining order were at the very least matched by the deteriorating political situation and the ability of the Adoula-Kasavubu government to effectively govern the country.

Throughout May and June, US officials were increasingly aware that a purely military solution was not enough to quash the popular discontent that had engulfed the Kivu region and threatened to spread through Congo. Nevertheless, as the June 30th deadline for the end of the Congolese Government's mandate approached, events threatened to overtake the embassy in Kinshasa in its search for an appropriate heir. By mid June the cable traffic with Washington was reverberating with speculation over who could or should be Kasavubu's new 'Formateur' and Prime Minister. Ultimately, while Defence Minister Jerome Anany's name popped up consistently as a moderate and workable alternative, Godley and his team came out in favour of a continuation of the Kasavubu-Adoula arrangement. The embassy and Washington were united in their rejection of the Belgian suggestion of including CNL members in any new government, 'Broad GOC along lines envisioned by Spaak would not be stable, would not be pro-Western and would not end Congo violence'.⁸⁷

One name that was at first vehemently rejected by Godley was that of the charismatic but controversial Moise Tshombe. In an almost hysterical tone, Godley warned against being tarnished by the same brush as the Belgians in supporting Tshombe's controversial and divisive self. Remarkably, Godley went as far as to portray him as in league with the CNL (and by extension the Chinese), despite Tshombe's right wing credentials and collusion with apartheid South Africa, 'Tshombe's true colours are flying from CHICOM-supported CNL flagpole and its is impossible to salute one without other'.⁸⁸ Perhaps this only demonstrates the depth of feeling Tshombe evoked in Godley who, then as the embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM), had opposed him and his gendarme/mercenary units during the Katangan secession of 1960. Indeed the West German ambassador noted precisely this personal antipathy ('allgemeine Reserve gegenüber Tshombe') leading to a

⁸⁷ Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 13th June 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁸⁸ Ibid.

perceived hesitancy on behalf of the United States to come out in support of Tshombe that July.⁸⁹ Certainly this supports Piero Gleijeses' contention that the embassy was taken by surprise when Kasavubu asked Tshombe to form a new government on July 6th.⁹⁰

While the US embassy in Kinshasa may have been surprised by the speed of events, it is by no means certain that the US was entirely absent from the behind the scene manoeuvring that led to this outcome and perhaps certain quarters within the State Department were not quite as bewildered.⁹¹ To be sure, there is no evidence to suggest that the America played an active role in bringing Tshombe to power. In his post mortem of the events to Washington, Godley surmised that Kasavubu was surprised by Tshombe's momentary popular appeal following his return to Kinshasa on the 24th June and panicked into appointing him 'Formateur'.⁹² Nevertheless, a detailed reading of both the State Department, CIA and Belgian Foreign Ministry correspondences and reports suggests a greater level of collusion from Washington than perhaps immediately apparent.

The Belgian government, as well as private business such as Union Minière Minière de Haut Katanga (UMHK), had long-standing ties to Tshombe and had actively collaborated with him both in the Katangan secession and the murder of Patrice Lumumba during the first year of Congolese independence.⁹³ As such, some level of involvement by Brussels in the events that unfolded seems likely. Indeed, throughout May Belgian reports were promulgating Tshombe's return to the Congolese politics as a natural expression of popular opinion, 'La population africaine qui se sent abandonnée et brimée par Leopoldville aspire à un changement qui la tourne naturellement vers le Président Tshombe'.⁹⁴ More than championing the cause of the Congolese population, it seems that Belgium was increasingly exacerbated with Premier Adoula's efforts to replace his Belgian advisors, no doubt driven by considerations of domestic political expediency, and wanted to counteract any potential decline in its influence over Congolese politics by seeing the revival of a tried and dependable ally.⁹⁵ Indeed, a further Brussels Foreign Ministry report stated Belgian made brief reference to precisely this

⁸⁹ Huber, Kinshasa to Bonn, 7th July 1964; B34- Band 497, Kongo Leopoldville, Rebellen, 1964, BRD

⁹⁰ Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions* p. 64

⁹¹ Harriman, Washington to Embassy Kinshasa, 16th July 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁹² Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 25th July 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁹³ de Witte, *The Assassination of Patrice Lumumba*

⁹⁴ J. de Bassompierre, 'Weekly Report 11th to 15th May, 1964'; File 18517- 4 - Congo- January to September 1964, BDA

⁹⁵ J. de Bassompierre, Weekly Report 1st to 8th May, 1964; File 18517- 4 - Congo- January to September 1964, BDA

Belgian involvement, 'A son passage á Bruxelles, l'ancien President Katangais a été reçu par M. Spaak... Le gouvernement Belge fidèle a sa politique d'apaisement et de réconciliation a pris les mesures en son pouvoir pour facilité le retour de M. Tshombe au Congo.'⁹⁶

More to the point, the United States was well aware of the Belgian attitude and the CIA pointed out that the Katangan's return to the political fold in Leopoldville could be instrumental, or at least a necessary precondition, in bringing about an increased Belgian military effort, 'Should the Congolese Government be forced to call on the Belgians for military assistance, the Belgians might well require Tshombe's presence in the government, perhaps as Premier, as a quid pro quo.'⁹⁷ Furthermore, as early as March, Harriman, who had personally met with Tshombe on two occasions in New York and Geneva, could be heard sounding out the Nigerian Prime Minister Balewa on the viability of Tshombe leading the Congolese government, cautioning that the US could not take the lead on such an arrangement due to the diplomatic difficulties involved.⁹⁸

Perhaps most tellingly, however, in a series of telegrams between Brussels and Washington the State Department expressed its view that, 'Inclusion representative Katangese individual or individuals, even Tshombe representative or representatives in cabinet acceptable however.'⁹⁹ Significantly, US ambassador MacArthur met with Belgian Foreign Secretary Spaak three days later and Tshombe himself the very next day to discuss exactly these issues. That Washington assumed Belgian involvement in the turn of events is clear from Harriman's reprimanding tone in a cable to Kinshasa on July 16th, 'Dept feels GOB should have kept US better informed about its relations with Tshombe in recent past, particularly as Harriman urged Spaak to take measures to ascertain Tshombe's intentions.' As such, the 'Brussels Cables' reveal that the State Department had signalled Tshombe's acceptability early on and was willing to let Belgium take the lead in pushing for his selection as Premier, no doubt in the hope that this might precipitate an increased Belgium role in solving Congo's security dilemmas. This is notable as it suggests that, in its eagerness for some kind of action, Washington was willing to let policy

⁹⁶ J. de Bassompierre, Weekly Report 22nd to 26th June, 1964; File 18517- 4 - Congo- January to September 1964, BDA

⁹⁷ CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, Memorandum: 'Security Situation in the Congo', 12th June 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁹⁸ Cable From Harriman, Washington to Godley, Kinshasa, 21st July 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL; Harriman in Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 26th March 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

⁹⁹ Tasca, Washington to MacArthur, Brussels, 20th June 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

be dictated by Belgium and events in Congo, even when this went against the opinions of its embassy staff on the ground and compromised the diplomatic position eventually taken by Kennedy during the first Congo crisis.

Unfortunately, Tshombe's rise to power far from ended Congo's internal problems. Those who had hoped for a truly inclusive political solution to Congolese turmoil would be disappointed by the slender legitimacy of the new 'Government of Reconciliation'. Power was concentrated narrowly with Kasavubu, Tshombe and his Katangan deputy, Godefroid Munongo, implicated in Kasai ethnic cleansing of 1960 and the murder of Lumumba.¹⁰⁰ Throughout July, the American Leopoldville embassy reported mounting rebel successes as the first towns began to fall to rebel activity deemed, 'not so much organised insurrection as spreading chaos'¹⁰¹. By the end of July, the rebels had taken Kalemie, Kirungu (Baudouinville), Kongolo, Kabalo and Uvira. Ominously, Kisangani fell on August 4th. Thus, the insurgents had taken over much of eastern Congo and the provinces of Kivu, Maniema and Katanga in what was essentially, 'a vacuum in which no-one, except possibly local figures, has any real control'.¹⁰² By August 11th, the embassy was so panicked that contingency plans for the evacuation of the capital were being drafted. Consistent with the reasoning explored in the first section of this chapter, the US desperately searched for an ally to shoulder the burden in Congo. While in the eyes of Washington, recently independent Africa may have been a 'mess' of European creation and responsibility, America's NATO allies remained unmoved. The hope of African troops actively intervening had also suffered a severe set back with the nomination of the widely despised Tshombe as Premier.

Perhaps in Congo, however, a ready-made answer was presenting itself in the form of white mercenaries. In the summer of 1964 the Vandewalle plan, named after Colonel Frederic Vandewalle- the Belgian military adviser to Tshombe, emerged. It envisioned integrating the three thousand strong Katangan gendarmes into the ANC while retaining a separate column of two to three hundred mercenaries from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Belgium and other European countries in light-armoured Ferrets to spearhead the drive into Eastern Congo. Conventional analyses suggest that it was the US that pushed Belgium and an accepting Tshombe

¹⁰⁰ Belgian diplomats in particular were frustrated with Tshombe's failure to deliver the hoped for government of reconciliation. J. de Bassompierre, 'Weekly Report 10th to 15th August, 1964'; File 18517- 4 - Congo- January to September 1964, BDA; See also Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *From Leopold to Kabila* p. 105

¹⁰¹ Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research, Thomas L. Hughes, 'Appraisal of Congolese Insurgency', 7th August 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

¹⁰² Ibid.

to adopt this as the viable next best alternative to regular foreign troops joining the ranks of the ANC. Piero Gleijeses argues that the Belgians bowed to American pressure to embrace the mercenary solution.¹⁰³ Wagoner and Odom's studies of the subsequent Stanleyville 'rescue' operation concur.¹⁰⁴ Certainly British Ambassador Rose voiced the opinion that the mercenary solution was a US-Belgian product following Harriman's diplomatic mission to Brussels that August.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, broadly the argument that the Belgians were harassed by American pressure for some kind of action to deal with Congo rings true. That is not to say, however, that the mercenary innovation was an American product. Indeed, this assumption needs to be reconsidered with closer attention to the exact sequence of events.

Throughout July it became increasingly clear that Tshombe was reverting to his tried tactic of using his Katangan gendarmes alongside white mercenaries. Already in May the Belgian embassy in Luanda had expressed the view that Katangan gendarmes and mercenaries were regrouping in Angola and by 28th July the American embassy was reporting the presence of mercenaries openly arriving in Leopoldville and settling at the Hotel Memling.¹⁰⁶ Thus Godley wrote, 'Now it is becoming common knowledge here in Leo that white mercenaries from Rhodesia, South Africa, Belgium and perhaps some other countries, have in fact returned at Tshombe's call.'¹⁰⁷ At this stage, the mixed messages were still coming from the American country team in Congo and no decision over the use of mercenaries appears to have been made in Washington. While agreeing with the Lubumbashi (Elizabethville) American Consul Dean and the US military attaché, Colonel William A. Dodds, that mercenaries might be the next best and only workable solution, Godley continued to warn against the negative implications any US association with such a mercenary force would have and on the 28th July the Belgian embassy in Washington reported that the State Department remained hesitant with similar reservations.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, a memorandum discussing the issue from Harriman to National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy suggests the US was still in

¹⁰³ Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions* p. 70

¹⁰⁴ Fred E. Wagoner, *Dragon Rouge: The Rescue of Hostages in the Congo* (University Press of the Pacific, Honolulu, 1980- 2004 edition) and Major Thomas P. Odom, 'Dragon Operations: Hostage Rescues in the Congo, 1964-65' *Leavenworth Papers* No. 14 (1988)

¹⁰⁵ Ambassador E. M. Rose, Kinshasa, Telegram No. 675 to Foreign Office London, 'Mercenaries and future ANC plans'; FO- 1100/9, British National Archives, Kew, Surrey (hereafter Kew)

¹⁰⁶ de Bassompierre, 'Weekly Report 18th to 22nd May, 1964'; File 18517- 4 - Congo- January to September 1964, BDA

¹⁰⁷ Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 28th July 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

¹⁰⁸ Ambassador Scheyven, Washington to Brussels, Telegram no. 181, July 28th 1964'; File 18293 I (a)- Congo Télégrammes- Entrées Washington 1964, BDA

deliberations over whether to embrace the emerging solution on the 4th August.¹⁰⁹

At the same time, it appears that the Belgians were involved on some level even at this early stage in Tshombe's plans. Godley voiced these suspicions towards the end of July and, more importantly, Dodds reported a meeting with the Belgian military mission on August 3rd in which Belgian Colonel Marlière (Mobutu's military advisor since the days of independence) had indicated that he would be arranging housing and logistical support of the two to three planeloads of Tshombe's new guests expected to arrive at Kamina airbase.¹¹⁰ A telegram from Foreign Minister Spaak on the 29th July confirms the accuracy of these suspicions as he explained the Belgian willingness to see mercenaries deployed provided that they were not Belgian nationals to his ambassador in Washington.¹¹¹ As a result, the correspondence suggests that Washington was just behind its Belgian allies in adopting this solution.

The balance in Washington appears to have been tipped when Bill Brubeck made his personal recommendation to the president to deal with the spreading turmoil in Congo by assisting the Congolese Government 'in every way to organise mercenary-led force' on August 6th. That same day, Rusk cabled Spaak stating that the 'President shares my deep concern over the situation' and going on to call for Belgian officer enlistment into the ANC or, alternatively, Belgian assistance in, 'establishment as soon as possible of gendarmerie force with mercenary officers.'¹¹² The outcome of Harriman's trip to Brussels, also leaving on the 6th, was thus a foregone conclusion. The Belgians remained firm in their refusal to commit regular officers to an active combat role amongst the ranks of the ANC but 'agreed' to share the burden of organising, equipping and supporting the assembling mercenary force.¹¹³ All this suggests that Godley's assessment on 3rd August was exactly right, 'It may be that Belgian military here, desiring as they do avoid greater direct military commitment to Congo, are pushing Tshombe and Mobutu hard on this point [the use of mercenaries].'¹¹⁴

This should not, of course, downplay the American role in the mercenary

¹⁰⁹ Harriman to National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy, 'Memorandum', 4th August 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

¹¹⁰ Dodds (USARMA), Kinshasa to Department of Defense (DOD), Washington, 3rd August 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

¹¹¹ Spaak, Brussels to Scheyven, Washington D.C., Telegram no. 18181, 29th July 1964; File 18293 II (c)- Télégrammes Département à Ambabel Washington, BDA

¹¹² Rusk, Washington to Spaak, Brussels, 6th August 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

¹¹³ Harriman, Brussels to Secretary of State, 8th August 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

¹¹⁴ Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 3rd August 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

solution. It was Washington that was applying pressure for some kind of decisive action and, when the mercenary solution suggested itself, was quite prepared to embrace it. That this was not the first choice contingency is clear from the continued search for foreign troops throughout August and beyond, as indicated by Assistant Secretary of State G. Mennen 'Soapy' Williams trip to garner support in Africa, the continued pressure on Tshombe to request troops from the OAU and Senegal, Liberia, Malaga and Nigeria individually, as well as the US effort to coax Bonn into deploying troops.¹¹⁵ These efforts, while sincere, were probably as much an attempt to demonstrate that the Government of Congo had no choice but to resort to mercenaries as they constituted a genuine desire to garner an alternative force to bare Congo's security burden.

As such, having followed the Belgian lead, the US commitment to Congo had again changed character by mid August. The Military Assistance Program (MAP) continued and by the end of August the US had made available eleven C-47s, twelve T-28s, twenty-four T6s, six H-21s and 7 B-26s to the FAC.¹¹⁶ Despite lip service to the contrary, the more direct involvement of US military personnel also quietly continued.¹¹⁷ Colonel Dodds joined the ANC/Belgian planning staff on directives of the Congo Working Group formed under Joseph Palmer II at the end of August; the 'three little Dodds', Bryant, MacFarlane and Rattan, continued to actively 'advise' the ANC efforts in Luluabourg and Bukavu; and Mobutu praised the efforts of US pilots as 'the only reason Bukavu was held'.¹¹⁸ In addition to overt military assistance came the innovation of the 'Harriman-Spaak deal' in Brussels to organise, furnish and finance a white mercenary force to come to Tshombe's rescue. The US alone, with its C-130 airlift capacity, would be responsible for ferrying both the Belgian supplied equipment, the ANC, as well as the mercenaries themselves. Thus, while architect only to a limited degree, the United States was both the catalyst and the primary driving force behind the ensuing onslaught on the rebel territory in Eastern Congo.

The results were clear and devastating. By the time Gbenye and Soumialot had formed their revolutionary government in Kisangani on September 6th, the

¹¹⁵ The Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs was popular on the continent for his call of 'Africa for the Africans' since the Kennedy years. G. Mennen Williams, *Africa for the Africans* (Ann Arbor; Books on Demand, 1969)

¹¹⁶ Commander in Chief, US Strike Force (CINCSTRIKE), Kinshasa to Joint Chief of Staff (JCS), Washington, August 19th 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 82, NSF, LBJL

¹¹⁷ Brubeck, 'Memorandum for the President', June 15th 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL and Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, Aug 28th 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 82, NSF, LBJL

¹¹⁸ Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, Aug 28th 1964 and 14th October 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 82, NSF, LBJL

insurgency was already suffering severe setbacks. Even before the mercenaries were effectively deployed, the American supplied air support was making itself felt. Colonel Dodds enthused over the ANC effort to hold Bukavu in August and a rag-tag ensemble of local police, ex-gendarmes and Belgian inhabitants on August 14th retook Moba.¹¹⁹ Throughout, the FAC was deemed the decisive factor operating 'with impunity' as the Simbas lacked any anti-aircraft weaponry worthy of mention.¹²⁰ Thus, when the all-white mercenary 'Fifth Column' finally got underway that November under the command of the Irish Colonel Michael Hoare, described by the press as 'Mad Mike' and by Devlin as 'a delightful gentlemen', rebel resistance crumbled.¹²¹ The CIA situation reports throughout the month tell how town after town was retaken with little resistance and few casualties in what the mercenaries themselves described as a 'coconut shoot'.¹²² Indeed, the rebels had no answer to this new force as the resigned words of one Simba commander recorded, 'No one fights American brigades'.¹²³ The fact that the rebels considered the mercenaries American only demonstrates the transparency of this covert operation. By November 10th the CIA estimated, 'The rebel regime is probably on the verge of collapse'.¹²⁴

This swift and decisive onslaught brought with it an ominous side effect. In their desperation, the insurgents turned on the white populations within rebel-held territory and sought to use them as hostages against the use of white mercenaries combined with US planes and military equipment. It was this turn of events that gave rise to the only direct Western intervention in Congo during the entire crisis. As T-28s strafed the Simbas to hold Bukavu, General Olenga decided to use US Consul Michael Hoyt and his staff as bait in this form. The message could not have been clearer. On 21st August Godley passed on a commercial telegram received from Kisangani with the following urgent appeal, apparently from Hoyt himself, 'We ask you emphatically (de la manière la plus 'insistant') to reconsider policy American

¹¹⁹ Col. Dodds to JCS, Washington, 23rd August 1964; & CIA Information Cable, 'Situation in Badouinville', 14th August 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 82, NSF, LBJL

¹²⁰ CIA Weekly Reports, 'Situation in the Congo', 17th November 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 87, NSF, LBJL

¹²¹ Interview with Devlin (Locust Grove, Virginia, 12th March 2004); Hoare himself bears testimony to the kind of gentleman he was describing an incident of military justice in which he shot off the big toes of one of his recruits for raping and murdering a Congolese girl in Kisangani. Mike Hoare, *Congo Mercenary* (Robert Hale, London, 1967) pp. 134-135

¹²² CIA Weekly Reports, 'Situation in the Congo', 10th and 17th November 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 87, NSF, LBJL; Lloyd Garrison, 'White Mercenaries on a Rabbit Hunt' *New York Times* (15th November 1964)

¹²³ CIA Weekly Reports, 'Situation in the Congo', 3rd November 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 87, NSF, LBJL

¹²⁴ CIA Weekly Reports, 'Situation in the Congo', 10th November 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 87, NSF, LBJL

military assistance Congo central government. The lives rpt. lives of all Americans resident here, including consular personnel, are at stake.'¹²⁵ On October 14th a 'ham' radio operator in Congo intercepted a message from Colonel Opepe in Kisangani to Colonel Olenga in Paulis, stating that American planes had bombed Bumba and requesting permission to kill all Americans in the 'liberated' zone.

To be clear, the lives of local white populations were only targeted once the combined mercenary and US-supplied aerial onslaught threatened the rebel cause from August. Thus Spaak, while considering the possibility of reprisals against the local European population, remarked to his ambassador in Paris that the rebel government in Kisangani had not taken an overtly anti- Western or anti-European character up until this point.¹²⁶ In other words, European and American lives in Congo were endangered as a direct consequence of US-Belgian policy. Moreover, while the protagonists were well aware of the risks they were taking, they were clearly rattled in how to respond to this precarious development. Initially in August, Washington considered taking counter-hostages. The October radio interception even saw a temporary caving in to rebel demands, with a seven-day aerial stand-down imposed by the US on the FAC between 16th and 23rd October.¹²⁷ While quite prepared to instrumentalise respected African leaders such as Jomo Kenyatta and Kwame Nkrumah into pressuring the insurgent leadership into ensuring humane treatment of their western captives, a sincere diplomatic effort to force negotiations with the Kisangani regime was never attempted by the United States, however.

Throughout 1964 American officials in Kinshasa and Washington alike had consistently ignored calls for negotiations on the grounds that the rebels lacked a central authority that truly controlled the movement. With regards to the hostage situation, however, this could not be deemed true. Gbenye remained open to Kenyatta's appeals not to harm the hostages in Kisangani throughout November and sent Thomas Kanza to negotiate a peaceful outcome with US Ambassador William Attwood in Nairobi on the 22nd November.¹²⁸ At the same time, from September Nkrumah had called for the withdrawal of foreign influence and a political settlement as the only viable solution to Congo, offering to chair round-table discussions under OAU auspices in Accra. Parallel to this the OAU met in

¹²⁵ Commercial Telegram from Michael Hoyt, Kisangani to Godley, Kinshasa and passed on to Secretary of State on 21st August 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 82, NSF, LBJL

¹²⁶ Spaak, Brussels to Jaspard, Paris, 10th August 1964; File 18517- 4 - Congo- January to September 1964, BDA

¹²⁷ CIA Weekly Reports, 'Situation in the Congo', 10th November 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 87, NSF, LBJL

¹²⁸ Ambassador Attwood provides a lively first hand account of these proceedings in his memoirs. William Attwood, *The Reds and the Blacks* (Harper & Row, New York and London, 1967) pp.208-217

Nairobi and called for a cease-fire and sent an ad-hoc commission under Kenyatta to Washington to appeal to Lyndon Johnson directly to push for national reconciliation in Congo. This African diplomatic mission did not receive an audience with the president, of course, under the pretext that no discussions could be held with regards to Congo in the absence of its sovereign government. A telegram from Dean Rusk to Kenyatta intended to smooth over the resulting diplomatic debacle,

‘I know you are aware through Ambassador Attwood of the importance my government attaches to the efforts of the Organisation of African Unity to contribute to a solution of the Congo problem... We sincerely regret, as I am sure you do, the difficulties that have arisen in connection with the proposed delegation from the OAU commission. I wish to assure you that my government wholeheartedly and unreservedly shares the objectives set forth in the OAU resolution, ie. “to support and encourage the efforts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the restoration of national reconciliation.”’¹²⁹

While playing lip service to a political settlement as proposed by the OAU, Washington was all the while planning its hostage rescue operations.

Here the United States once more allowed itself to be dominated by the Belgian position. As early as the 7th November Spaak had signalled to his American counterpart that the time for talk was over and that decisive action was needed.¹³⁰ At this point Washington was still dithering until finally coming round to the Belgian view as is clearly borne out by the notes of a telephone conversation between Undersecretary of State George Ball and McGeorge Bundy that expressed a willingness to negotiate scuppered by Belgian intransigence, ‘Mr. Ball said to him that there were two courses of action. One is to try to play this negotiating track out, but we haven’t any cards because the Belgians won’t play. The second is to drop the paratroopers in.’¹³¹ Although Belgium was dependent on America’s moral support and its crucial airlift capacity, the United States again remained reluctant to take a decisive lead and use its leverage to dictate policy to its allies. The result was an American refusal to negotiate with the rebels and Kanza’s call for a cease-fire was deemed ‘outrageous blackmail’ and rejected.¹³² In fact, the situation reports of these negotiations suggest that Attwood was used as a mere stalling tactic while the final

¹²⁹ Rusk, Washington to President Kenyatta, Nairobi, 27th September 1964 and passed on to Kwame Nkrumah on the same day; RG17-2-570, OAU Papers, PRAAD

¹³⁰ Telegram from Spaak, Washington to Ambassador de Kerchove, Kinshasa, 7th November 1964; File 18293 I (a)- Congo Télégrammes- Entrées Washington; 1964, BDA

¹³¹ Notes on Telecon: ‘George Ball and McGeorge Bundy’, 20th November 1964; Personal Papers, Papers of George W. Ball, Box 2, LBJL

¹³² Attwood, *Reds and the Blacks* p. 215

preparations for the 'Dragon' operations were made, 'Ambassador Attwood's instructions remain unchanged although the purpose of the talks is now purely a holding operation.'¹³³ In other words, the efforts of Kenyatta, Nkrumah and the OAU were cynically deployed to delay any possible violence against the hostages while American-Belgian military planning progressed.

Thus, following a further declaration by Gbenye's rebel government that Belgians and Americans were being treated as prisoners of war and their lives depended upon a cessation of all aerial attacks, the president approved operation 'Dragon Rouge' from his ranch in Texas.¹³⁴ On November 24th, a total of seventeen US C-130s airlifted 600 Belgian para-troops to free the hostages in Kisangani. Two days later, a further seven C-130s dropped 256 Belgian Para-troops at Paulis (Isiro) in the second 'Dragon' operation (Dragon Noir). All in all, these two direct interventions evacuated 1,295 hostages from the rebel-held towns (919 from Kisangani and 375 from Isiro). Fifty-five of these were Americans. An estimated seventy-six white hostages were killed in these immediate operations (sixty in Kisangani and sixteen in Isiro), three of these American. Despite the CIA warning that around a further thousand hostages, were being held at Wamba, south of Isiro, no further rescue operations were undertaken. As predicted by the CIA, a further 185 Europeans were killed at Wamba, not to mention the thousands of Congolese that lost their lives in reprisals from both sides as a direct consequence of these operations. Thus, viewed in purely humanitarian term, the decision not to negotiate with the rebels appears questionable at the least.¹³⁵ Indeed, the Kisangani intervention revealed deep pitfalls in the American strategy in Congo at this early stage.

Within a year of his inauguration, the Johnson administration had once more embroiled the United States in a further conflict in Congo. Its efforts to balance countering the spreading turmoil in Africa's heart with its obvious reluctance to be dragged into another Third World conflict alongside its growing commitments in Vietnam ensured an executive in Washington both eager to shore up the Kinshasa government but quite willing to follow the lead of its Belgian ally to mastermind the details of its renewed intervention. Accurate readings of rural uprisings fuelled by

¹³³ National Security Council (NSC), Executive Secretary, Bromley Smith, 'Special Situation Reports', 23rd November 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 84, NSF, LBJL

¹³⁴ National Security Council Staffer, Hal Saunders, Memorandum (passed from then NSC staffer Robert Komer to Bundy); Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

¹³⁵ Certainly the West German embassy reported that the Kisangani strike was a failure both in humanitarian and political terms. Telegram from Kinshasa to Bonn, 'Belgisch-Amerikanische Befreiungsaktion im Kongo', 1st December 1964; Band 500, Kongo Leopoldville 1964, B34, BRD

local discontent and loosely harnessed by disenfranchised politicians looking for a place in Kinshasa's political fold thus nevertheless led to an effort to control events in Congo, even in the absence of any imminent Soviet or communist involvement. Following the Belgian lead, however, not only tied America to the return of Moise Tshombe and all this 'walking museum of colonialism' stood for but also implicated the United States in his domestic misdoings and his questionable allegiances to the Belgian colonial masters as well as the Portuguese and South African white minority regimes.¹³⁶ Following Kennedy's successful rhetorical appeal to African nationalism, the United States was now once more intimately associated with the formation of a white mercenary force and a direct military intervention of the former colonial power to crush the aspirations of an indigenous uprising. Moreover, the popular backlash that ensued throughout Africa and the Third World even rallied the Soviet Union and its allies to the rebel cause.

Choosing Sides: the Implications of Johnson's Congo Policies

By contrast to this predecessor, under Johnson the American handling of Congo betrayed its insensitivity to the growing aspirations of African nationalists. At the heart of this lay two fundamentally opposing paradigms. Nkrumah and the CIA's Larry Devlin seemingly concurred on the strategic importance of Congo in the heart of Africa. For the latter, however, this presented a possible springboard for communist subversion of the continent while the former saw Congo's continuing troubles as the soft underbelly for further neo-colonial domination and white minority rule in Africa. Washington's Cold War preoccupation no doubt ensured that the impact of its policies on Congo and the wider region remained secondary. While its reliance on a Belgian lead and recourse to white mercenaries might prove successful in the immediate crushing of the Congolese rebellion, this rather blinkered approach once more transformed a parochial uprising into a Cold War crisis in Congo. The Soviet Union and its allies finally responded to the popular outcry that reverberated through Africa in the wake of the Kisangani intervention by once more supplying material support to the insurgents, with Cuba even sending troops to rally the rebel cause.

The darker implications for Congo were clear even to contemporary American observers. Not only did the American approach entirely ignore calls to negotiate with the rebels and the exiled CNL exiles (as proposed by both Nkrumah and the

¹³⁶ Algeria's President Ahmed Ben Bella quoted in Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions* p. 65

African diplomatic drive and even the Belgian government), but a pattern of American support for the instruments of internal repression of the central government was also established at this stage. It was the US-Belgian backing, for example, that allowed the Congolese government to pursue its own political vendettas in Kinshasa. While there is no evidence that it was directly involved, the CIA at the very least was privy to the lists of who was targeted by the Sûreté's assassination commandos in the clamp down on political opposition that August.¹³⁷ At the same time, Tshombe had ordered the expulsion from Kinshasa of all Congolese (Brazzaville) nationals and women and children assembled at roadsides in the capital while the heads of households were rounded up. The result was 'predictable hysteria, tears, anguish and increased tension.'¹³⁸ That the United States was essentially acting as quartermaster for a rapacious and abusive ANC was also plainly apparent. By the latter half of 1964, however, the Congolese Government's most notorious weapon were the white mercenary commandos whose appalling spree of looting, rape and murder at Kisangani did not escape the African and international press, as Piero Gleijeses has shown.¹³⁹

It was this latter point that brought with it the most sinister implication for American policy in Congo thus far, however, as it demonstrated a willingness to collaborate with the 'Ancien Regime' of white rule in Africa in the form of the Portuguese and Apartheid South African governments. That the mass recruitment of South Africans to fight in this private army was not possible without at least 'tacit agreements' from the South African government was clear, not least to Ambassador Godley.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, the West German embassy in Cape Town wrote to Berlin about precisely this very public recruitment on the streets of Johannesburg with the 'absolute consent' ('unter der vollen Duldung') of the South African government.¹⁴¹ More than simply looking away, however, representatives of the South African government were present in Congo and even met with American officials on multiple occasions. Thus both Godley and the British Military Attaché reported a meeting between the Belgian Colonel Van de Walle, Colonel Dodds and a Brigadier Robertze (Robertse in the British reports) at the former's house on the 14th

¹³⁷ Intelligence Information Cable, distributed 29th August 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 82, NSF, LBJL

¹³⁸ Dodds, Kinshasa to DoD, Washington, 20th August 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 82, NSF, LBJL

¹³⁹ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions* pp. 70-75

¹⁴⁰ Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 15th September 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 87, NSF, LBJL

¹⁴¹ German Embassy, Capetown to Auswärtiges Amt, Bonn, 'Anwerbung Südafrikanischer Söldner in Johannesburg', 25th February 1965; Band 587, Kongo, Leopoldville Januar-Dezember 1965, B34, BRD

September. Godley was keen to stress that this was a necessary meeting to smooth over differences between the South Africans and the other nationals assembling at Kamina in order to keep the Van de Walle plan on track. Privy to the American minutes of the meeting, the British account offers rather more as Robertze apparently both produced credentials as the official representative of the South African government and explained that Tshombe had requested South African assistance already two months before his return to Congo and his government had consented provided that he was 'the representative of the legitimate government at the time.' Indeed, according to Godley the South Africans, more than assisting in the recruitment, were also offering material assistance in the form of uniforms and web-equipment. Godley concluded this report by stating that these contacts would be upheld for 'intelligence purposes' as Van de Walle was keeping his cards 'dangerously close to his chest'.¹⁴²

Similarly, Tshombe's close ties with the Portuguese were apparent by their willingness to allow his Katangan gendarmes to return to Congo across the Angolan border suggesting 'that secret agreements likewise exist between Tshombe and ranking Portuguese officials,' in Godley's words.¹⁴³ This also marked a shift in Congo's previously benevolent attitude towards the Angolan freedom fighters, and Holden Roberto's Revolutionary Government in Exile (GRAE) in particular,¹⁴⁴ leaving the United States in the strangely ambivalent position of maintaining Holden Roberto on a CIA pay roll while on the other hand supporting a Portugal friendly regime in Kinshasa.¹⁴⁵ More than turning a quiet blind eye, however, the Portuguese government too appears to have offered material support to Tshombe's regime in the form of two DC-4 planes from Luanda.¹⁴⁶ Ultimately, all this suggests that, while keenly aware of the diplomatic cavities of this unpalatable association with minority white rule in Africa, the United States was quite prepared to accept assistance and even actively cooperate with the Portuguese and South African governments in order to ensure the success of the Van de Walle plan. In fact, the American embassy in Kinshasa and the State Department in Washington were both

¹⁴² Godley to Secretary of State, 15th September 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 87, NSF, LBJL

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ The newly arrived German ambassador in Kinshasa, Baron von Müllheim-Rechberg, remarked upon precisely this shift in support. Adoula personally had been close to Roberto and his government had both furnished the GRAE with weapons and permitted a military training camp to be established at Kinkusu. Telegram from Müllheim-Rechberg, Kinshasa to Bonn, *Verhältnis der Kongolesischen Regierung zu den Angolanischen Befreiungsbewegungen*, 7th May 1965; Band 587, Kongo Leopoldville Januar- Dezember 1965, B34, BRD

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, Stephen R. Weissman, *'CIA Covert Action in Zaire and Angola: Patterns and Consequences'*, *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 94, No. 2 (Summer, 1979), pp. 263-286

¹⁴⁶ Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 9th February 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

eager to ignore this unpleasant aspect of US policy by simply blurring the details of the mercenaries' origins, as Godley concluded, '...we have always supported VdW plan and basic element that South African mercenaries being "cutting edge" of each of the 6 columns. This was clearly brought out in Governor Williams' meeting with Tshombe, but here again nationality of mercenaries never probed.'¹⁴⁷ Washington was thus quite prepared to make Faustian bargains with the reactionary forces of Africa in its eagerness to shore up the Kinshasa government.

The American willingness to collaborate with both Belgium and the forces of continued white minority rule in Africa had immediate diplomatic consequences. On the one hand, Washington did effectively contain the outrage of the OAU throughout this period. With subtle diplomacy it successfully managed the delegation sent to Washington by the Ad Hoc Commission on Congo under Kenyatta in September and curtailed the severity of the condemnations made at the Addis Ababa Summit called on the 27th November in response to Kisangani.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, by February of the following year the OAU was again playing a positive if peripheral role in Congo as a delegation arrived to observe the national elections. Nevertheless, the diplomatic fall-out was severe. As Ambassador Attwood himself wrote in 1967 of the African reaction to Kisangani,

'The white man with a gun, the old plunderer who had enslaved his ancestors, was back again, doing what he pleased, when he pleased, where he pleased. And there wasn't a damn thing Africa could do about it, except yell rape... The yelling started on November 25th and lasted for several weeks.'¹⁴⁹

This time, however, the United States was one of these 'white men'. Of course Cold War propaganda efforts played a part, but a genuine heartfelt outrage spread through Africa, as demonstrations in Cairo, Algiers, Dar es Salaam, Khartoum and Nairobi made known.¹⁵⁰

The 'beacon on the hill' image of America so successfully projected to Africa by Kennedy had been shattered within the first year of Johnson's presidency. Perhaps the biggest diplomatic setback, however, was suffered by the OAU itself, 'which emerged with its membership split and its prestige dimmed,' according to Attwood himself.¹⁵¹ Indeed, Ghanaian reports from Nairobi in early 1965 illustrate the frustrations and internal squabbling of the Council of Ministers unable to reach

¹⁴⁷ Ibid

¹⁴⁸ Brubeck, Memo, 20th September 1964, LBJL- NSF- Country File- Africa- Congo- Box 82

¹⁴⁹ William Attwood, *The Reds and the Blacks* (Harper & Row, New York and London, 1967) p.219

¹⁵⁰ Bromley Smith, 'Congo Special Situation Report', No. 15, 27th November 1964, LBJL- NSF- Country File- Africa- Congo- Box 84

¹⁵¹ Attwood, *The Reds and the Blacks* p. 236

further resolutions on Congo.¹⁵² The American-Belgian approach of bypassing the OAU while cynically harnessing the goodwill and influence of African Statesmen to their own ends, rather than strengthening this fledgling institution, left African leaders floundering in their own impotence. Within a year of its inception, American Cold War manoeuvres in Congo had shattered the illusions of this organisation. This must be seen as a profoundly negative, if not immediately apparent, development to an administration fearful of the spread of chaos and turmoil, with communism on its back, through the continent.

Hand in hand with this negative publicity and popular backlash against the US came an equally sinister but more tangible development- the growing internationalisation of the conflict. To be sure, with Rwandan Tutsi and Sudanese refugees and Holden Roberto's Angolan Revolutionary Government in Exile (GRAE) within Congolese borders, any conflict in Congo was to have a certain international element to it. For example, the Congolese government was quite willing to involve itself in a cross border dispute with Sudan and an American intelligence report in January pointed to Kinshasa forwarding arms to the Sudanese rebels and Mobutu's instructing Mike Hoare to contact a Southern Sudanese dissident leader then in Kinshasa to coordinate mercenary activity with the Sudanese rebels as the Congo Army approached the Sudan border.¹⁵³ On the other hand, much to the dismay of many African nationalists, Tshombe harassed the efforts of Holden Roberto's attacks on Angola from Congo.¹⁵⁴ At the same time Tutsi refugees hounded the Rwandan governments from Congo and Uganda piled troops on its Congo border, fearful of mercenary incursions. This had the negative consequence, from an American point of view, that in backing Tshombe the United States was in effect involving itself much more deeply in Africa than ever intended by the Johnson team. Indeed, these border entanglements were to have at times extremely negative if peripheral fallout for the US itself when, for example, a US pilot crashed on the Rwandan side of the border in August 1964 or a Ugandan school was mistakenly targeted by an air attack in February 1965.¹⁵⁵

A more immediate threat to Washington's policies was the shift from the

¹⁵² Telegram from Ambassador Botsio, Nairobi to Principal Secretary for African Affairs, Accra; SC-BAA- 499- Mixed up Letters- 22/12/60-25/1/66, PRAAD

¹⁵³ CIA Weekly Report, 'The Situation in the Congo' 27th January 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 87, NSF, LBJL

¹⁵⁴ Godley reporting conversation with Tunisian Charge D'Affaires Guibliaoui, 15th February 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

¹⁵⁵ Secretary of State to all African Posts, 27th August 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 82, NSF, LBJL; Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 24th February 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

vociferous, if largely rhetorical, condemnations of Tshombe and his backers to actual material Soviet and African assistance to the rebels that began to emerge in the latter part of 1964, no doubt in response to the increasingly active US-Belgian role in Congo. By mid November the first firm evidence of an Ilyushin-18 delivery of small arms from Algeria, possibly with Ugandan, Tanzanian and Kenyan approval was recorded by the CIA. By January 19th the CIA had counted over forty planeloads of arms received by the rebels from Algeria and Egypt with the assistance of Congo's neighbours. Over five thousand rebels were reportedly receiving training in Uganda, Sudan and Tanzania and the Chinese continued to offer peripheral assistance in the form of weapons and technical advice from Brazzaville and Bujumbura. It was also the Kisangani intervention that appears to have finally spurred the Communist Bloc into active assistance to the rebel cause. In this way the German Democratic Republic, having first assured itself that both the Soviet Union and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic were also committed to material assistance, approved a request for arms, uniforms and boots, radios, typewriters and photographic material, as well as sending seven technicians (two radio specialists and five military instructors to operate from the UAR and Sudan) in December 1964. An agreement to this effect was signed on the 13th January 1965. Clearly this was a significant development as it brought the Soviet Union and its allies once more to Congo.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Washington was not panicked by this sharp increase in material aid. The air-supported mercenaries were doing a fine job and the CIA concluded, 'it does not appear at the present time that arms alone will be enough to shore up the rebel regime.'¹⁵⁷

Of greater concern to Washington than this limited aid was the prospect of increased active intervention on behalf of the Simba cause, something the Soviet Union was still reluctant to do. Throughout February 1965 unconfirmed reports were mounting that African, Chinese and even Arab volunteers were cited amongst the rebels. The keenly felt fear was that, in Godley's words, this would wipe out the one very real advantage the ANC had over the rebels; 'leadership of hard-hitting

¹⁵⁶ A renewed request for arms was made by the rebels on the 14th December 1964 and exactly on month later the GDR consented to the delivery of 2000 machine-pistols with 60,000 rounds of ammunition, 100 "Panzerbüchsen", 2 RPGs with 2000 grenades, 10 transportable receivers, 5 grenade launchers with 360 grenades, 30,000 pairs of boots, 2000 tent frames, 10 cameras with laboratory equipment, 500 films and 10 typewriters. 'Protokoll der Verhandlungen zwischen Mitglied des Zentral Komitees der CNL, M'Bagira, und Genosse Georg Stibi, Stellvertretender Außenminister, Berlin', 14 Januar 1965; Mikrofiche A14593, Unterstützung der bewaffneten Befreiungskämpfe des Kongolesischen Volkes durch die DDR, 1964-65, MfAA, DDR

¹⁵⁷ The details of the paragraph are taken from CIA Weekly Report, '*Situation in the Congo*' 10th November 1964-27th January 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 87, NSF, LBJL

non-Congolese volunteers.’¹⁵⁸ As Gleijeses had conclusively shown, the only troops that would deploy to Congo were sent by Cuba. Ché Guevara and some 114 volunteers arrived at Kibamba from Tanzania from the end of April 1965 to strengthen the Simba rebels. Remarkably, they remained undetected by the United States until the following September when Godley dispatched a spate of excited telegrams warning, ‘Several hundred non-African advisors reported throughout area, of which approx 160 are Cubans located in each rebel centre and with each unit.’ The Cubans not only gave tactical advice but also engaged in actual fighting alongside the rebels and undoubtedly made their presence felt, as Godley noted, ‘impact on military situation unarguable.’¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, neither the arrival of weapons or even the presence of the Cubans themselves would prove sufficient to sustain the crumbling Simba movement.

Indeed, the purpose of the above paragraphs is not to suggest that American policy was ineffective in dealing with the insurgency. As has been seen, both the FAC and the mercenary columns devastated the Simba rebellion. The majority of the hostages had been rescued, difficulties with the OAU had been managed, the negative publicity of American intervention had been contained and by July 1965 an Intelligence Memorandum concluded, ‘the Congo is quieting fitfully’.¹⁶⁰ While perhaps not a primary US concern, even Belgian economic stakes appeared unharmed as industrial diamond production was unhindered, copper production was above pre-independence levels and Union Minière’s annual report of 1964 stated, ‘the wave of rebellion which steeped vast areas of the Congo in blood, happily did not reach us.’¹⁶¹ Furthermore, Belgium had even finally acquiesced to a more direct military role as Belgian regular officers reportedly volunteered to remain in Congo to support and lead the mercenaries after Stanleyville.

Nevertheless, the above analysis suggests a more nuanced picture. While the short term successes were undeniable, some questions should be asked with regard to American policy. Even as the limited threat assessment of actual Communist interference remained unchanged, the United States growing commitments had entangled it ever further in Congo. Washington had at the very least played a hand in Tshombe’s rise to power in July. It subsequently increased the military assistance to his government, continued to furnish and pay for both the planes and pilots of

¹⁵⁸ Godley to Secretary of State, September 21 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ CIA Intelligence Memorandum, ‘Situation in the Congo’, 1 July 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

the FAC and was instrumental in the formation, financing, equipping and ferrying of the white mercenary column. The decision not to negotiate a peaceful outcome to the Kisangani hostage situation also appears questionable, as Washington abdicated decision making to Belgium in this instance and the subsequent loss of life at Wamba must be seen as a direct extension of this. Under Secretary of State Ralph Bunche made exactly this point on the very next day charging that the Para-troop drop 'caused a loss of life that would not otherwise have occurred'.¹⁶² Furthermore, it was this increased involvement, combined with the direct intervention in Kisangani, that ensured the transition from an indigenous uprising fuelled by local discontent to a return of the Cold War to Congo in which the US found itself siding, perhaps inadvertently, with the reactionary elements of former colonial powers and white minority regimes. Indeed, despite its often-accurate assessment of events in Congo, under Johnson the American reluctance to take a decisive lead, while nevertheless escalating its commitments in the name of its superpower rivalry, established a pattern of superficial engagement that neglected both Congo's immediate problems and the concerns of the wider region.

¹⁶² Bromley Smith, 'Special Situation Reports No. 11', 25th November 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 84, NSF, LBJL

Conclusion

The American Congo policy under President Johnson was marred by its inability to transcend prevalent Cold War anxieties despite the seemingly accurate intelligence at hand and a willingness defer the formulation of a coherent strategy to its Belgian allies. Various explanations can be advanced for this rather blinkered approach to a complex situation in Congo. First of all, any discussion of Western intervention in Congo cannot ignore the role of racial prejudices prevalent in contemporary minds in the early 1960s. Much has been written on the impact of the Cold War on race-relations both in US domestic and foreign politics.¹⁶³ Indeed, a degree of racism was at times dimly concealed beneath the surface of the cable traffic with Kinshasa and the reports drafted in Washington. The scornful tone of Bill Brubeck's note to the President referring to 'pygmies carrying spears and machetes'¹⁶⁴ was noted earlier. By contrast, the Ghanaian ambassador in Kinshasa appears to have given rather more credit to the insurgents, their ability to use rudimentary weaponry in their fight against government forces and at times their intricate guerrilla tactics.¹⁶⁵ Similarly, both the African press and political leadership noted with dismay the importance placed on saving the lives of white hostages in Kisangani, while the at times indiscriminate slaughter of Congolese civilians and the atrocities committed at the hands of both the ANC and the mercenary Fifth Column received far less attention. In exactly this way, Borstelmann points to a Time Magazine article following the Kisangani airlift that ran a picture of the murdered American missionary, Dr. Paul Carson, on the front cover and argued, 'African civilisation... is largely a pretence... The sane part of the world could only wonder whether Black Africa could be taken seriously at all, or whether, for the foreseeable future, it is beyond the reach of reason.'¹⁶⁶ Not only did this article conveniently overlook the atrocities committed by the ANC and the

¹⁶³ Mary L. Dudziak and Harold Isaacs offer interesting studies of the impact of international public opinion on the civil rights movement in America, while Thomas Borstelmann gives perhaps the most encapsulating overview of the interplay between domestic race-relations, the civil rights movement and Cold War politics. Mary L. Dudziak *'Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative'* and Harold R. Isaacs *'American Race Relations and the United States Image in World Affairs'* in Michael L. Krenn (ed.) *Race and US Foreign Policy During the Cold War* (Garland Publishing Inc., London & New York, 1998); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Harvard Uni. Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 2001)

¹⁶⁴ Brubeck, 'Memorandum for the President', 15th June 1964, Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

¹⁶⁵ Ambassador Quashie, Kinshasa to African Secretary, Kinshasa, 11th June 1964; SC- BAA-499- Mixed Up Letter, 22/12/1960-25/1/1966

¹⁶⁶ Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Harvard Uni. Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 2001) p. 178

white mercenaries in particular leading up to and in the immediate aftermath of the November operation, but it actually pointed to race as the underlying factor behind the atrocities committed on the side of the Simbas. In the same vein, articles in the New York Times revelled in the gory details of Congolese atrocities, the use of sorcery and supposed incidents of cannibalism, while the rare mentions of the mercenaries were confined to either brief anodyne references or even remarkably sympathetic and likeable portrayals of supposedly professional soldiers caught up in a sea of horrific violence between the ANC and the insurgents.¹⁶⁷ As Piero Gleijeses has shown, the European press was not as uncritical when it came to Michael Hoare's Fifth Column.¹⁶⁸

When Lloyd Garrison, the New York Times reporter in Congo for this period, was interviewed about the role of racism in the press he commented that he was never aware of any editorial bias driven by racial ideology but contemporary journalism may have at times been informed by engrained cultural prejudices.¹⁶⁹ Perhaps a similar distinction should be made for Washington's policy makers. A valid criticism of some of the literature on racism in American foreign policy is the tendency to mistake underlying tensions with primary motivations. There is nothing in the evidence at hand to suggest that the United States was pursuing a deliberately racial foreign policy towards Congo. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to suppose that policymakers in Washington and Kinshasa were informed by the same cultural biases that shaped contemporary journalism and ensured that white lives were valued above those of black Africans and mercenary atrocities were accepted and played down, while the apparent blood and gore of indigenous 'tribal' rituals were reviewed with relative glee. More importantly still, while its exact impact is difficult to calibrate, these engrained prejudices no doubt contributed to Washington's Cold War paranoia and, ultimately, its reluctance to permit the presumed backward leadership of the 'Dark Continent' to take charge of its own political destiny as the rebel leadership was ignored and Nkrumah, Kenyatta and the OAU's mediation efforts were cynically bypassed.

A more readily discarded interpretation places American economic considerations at the heart of its Congo policies. Nkrumah himself wrote to the Belgian Prime Minister complaining of 'outside foreign powers who seem to want

¹⁶⁷For Example, Lloyd Garrison, *'The Congo Rebels: Witchcraft or Bureaucracy'* New York Times (December 4, 1964) p. 4; Lloyd Garrison, *'White Mercenaries on a Rabbit Hunt'* New York Times (November 15, 1964) pp. SM 30,32,82,84,87,89,90,92

¹⁶⁸ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions* pp.72-73

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Lloyd Garrison, Norfolk, Connecticut, 17th March 2004

nothing more than confusion in our midst so they can continue to fish in troubled waters.’¹⁷⁰ More specifically about the United States he wrote, ‘America’s main interest... is to secure complete economic domination with the object of keeping out all other influences.’¹⁷¹ As has been seen, this Ghanaian view of a neo-colonial America with economic designs on Congo’s resources is no more rooted in fact than the American tendency to view events in terms of threatening communist subversion. In fact, during this period the United States was not competing with Belgium for resources and control over the territory. Nowhere did economic considerations play a major role in the correspondence between Washington and Kinshasa. More to the point, during two pivotal moments, the return of Moïse Tshombe and the Kisangani intervention, Washington was quite prepared to allow Belgium to take the lead and very much wanted it to assume the burden of responsibility; no doubt viewing their NATO ally as the most predictable and dependable source of stability for Congo. As such, it is hard to justify this strictly economic neo-colonial interpretation of Johnson’s Congo policies with the evidence at hand.

That is not to say, however, that the United States was not looking to exert its dominance over Congo. In fact, Washington was practicing a more subtle form of subjugation as it sought to control the political processes in Kinshasa and dictate the emergence and survival of a Congolese government acceptable to Washington and malleable to Western Cold War designs. In other words, even in the absence of an active Soviet role in Congo, as the Johnson administration surveyed Congo it once more interpreted events in terms of its superpower confrontation with the Soviet Union. The combined weight of its Cold War preoccupations and the fear of being drawn into a direct role in another Third World conflict remained at the heart of American motivations at this stage and ensured that Washington entirely failed to engage the more fundamental issues of ending colonial occupation and minority white rule in a continent still struggling for independence. As a result, it is hardly surprising that Nkrumah and other African onlookers did not distinguish between the economic agenda of the old colonial order and the more political motivations of this peculiar American Cold War brand of neo-colonialism.

These unpalatable associations, of course, contributed to the most deeply negative implication of the Johnson line for American standing throughout the

¹⁷⁰ Nkrumah to Belgian Prime Minister, 22nd December 1964; SC- BAA- 444, Letters between Osagyefo and Congo (Leopoldville), PRAAD

¹⁷¹ Nkrumah to the Ghanaian Representative at the United Nations, Quaison-Sackey, 14th February 1963; RG-17-2-207, Political Relations with Congo 1/3/63-14/1/65, PRAAD

region. Rather than addressing Congo's troubles through the regional forum of the OAU under the diplomatic initiatives of Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta, the United States subverted these efforts weakening both the prestige and resolve of this fledgling organisation. Moreover, this inability to work with African leaders to devise a regional solution to the Congo crisis was simply a symptom of a more fundamental problem and the greatest shortcoming of Johnson's Congo policies. Before his untimely death, Kennedy had realised that a new wind was sweeping the African continent and, rhetorically at least, had looked to place America on the side of progress and change towards African independence and majority rule. From the very outset of its foray into Congo and Africa at large, however, the Johnson administration utterly failed to devise a strategy for engaging the gathering momentum of African independence. Much rather, an ad-hoc and reactive series of policy decisions, at times following the lead of its country team while often simply relying on its Belgian counterparts, assured that Washington both assumed a growing role in Congo while at the same time failing to address local grievances or underlying regional tensions. In the on going struggle of African independence, the United States had once more emerged on the side of the reactionary old order of white minority rule.

The American position in turn had repercussions for the broader Cold War. Most immediately, the popular backlash of the Kisangani operations finally moved the Soviet Bloc to offer material assistance to the rebels and even saw Cuban troops assume an active role in Congo's civil war as has been seen. As such, the American intervention directly contributed to once more internationalising a largely parochial uprising in Congo into a global dispute. This was the paradox of the Johnson Africa policy that was at once seen as effectively dealing with spreading turmoil in Congo, while it inadvertently brought a resurgence of the Cold War rivalry to the region and by extension increased American stakes in a successful conclusion and pro-Western outcome to the Congolese power struggle. Violence continued to simmer and Kinshasa was beset with political infighting as 1964 and much of 1965 remained fraught with difficulties. It was only the emergence of Mobutu as Congo's sole political voice the following year that allowed Johnson to ultimately claim a Cold War victory in Africa borne out of its short-term manipulations during the 1964 escalation.

2

**Clandestine King-Making:
Lyndon Johnson and the Rise of Mobutu**

While the combination of white mercenaries and US-supplied air power appeared to master the eastern rebellion, Congo continued to simmer as the political infighting between Tshombe and Kasavubu intensified throughout the first half of 1965. Just as in 1960, as the politicians wrangled, Mobutu took charge of the country with a bloodless coup on the 25th November 1965, much to the relief of the Johnson administration. This time, however, he would retain power and move to strengthen his hold over Congolese politics in the subsequent years. Official Ghanaian reports and correspondence from Kinshasa, Accra and the letters of Nkrumah himself offer a good indication of Mobutu's standing in independent Africa; consistently pointing to his cruelty, ineffective command and his fratricidal role in Patrice Lumumba's murder as an instrument of neo-colonialism.¹⁷² In 1965, however, Washington looked to Joseph Désiré Mobutu to resolve its Congo dilemma. Indeed, the coup of the ANC's Commander-in-Chief is usually mentioned as an addendum to the US-Lumumba saga, with American involvement implied as the final part of a successful covert intervention in Africa wrapped up. Mobutu's long standing ties to the CIA dating back to his role in the pre-independence negotiations in Brussels where he both reported to the Belgian Sûreté and made his first contacts with Lawrence Devlin, as well as their collaboration during his first coup in 1960, certainly lends itself to such an interpretation.¹⁷³ The United States was certainly integral to Mobutu's eventual rise to political pre-eminence and intimately involved in his coup plotting as will be seen. Examining the American effort to contain Kinshasa's political turmoil in the immediate build up to the coup reveals an altogether more complex picture, however.

Before delving into the coup itself, the final death throws of the Simba rebellion and the success of the combined military and diplomatic effort that sealed its fate will first be briefly considered. Alongside the clear superiority of the mercenary units with aerial support from the FAC in the field, the increasing isolation of the insurgents as foreign backers withdrew support in response to the incessant infighting of its flawed leadership ultimately ensured the demise of the Simbas. Beyond this, a more detailed study of Mobutu's coup reveals a strong, if at times circumstantial, case for a high level of US involvement in Mobutu's power seizure. Considering both how American officials viewed Congo's emerging leader before his sudden rise and their policy deliberations in the immediate build-up to the coup

¹⁷² Letter from Nkrumah to Adoula, 24th March 1964; RG17-2-207- Political Relations With Congo Leopoldville, 1/3/63-14/1/65, PRAAD; Also, Nkrumah, *Challenge of the Congo* (Nelson, 1967)

¹⁷³ Kelly, *America's Tyrant* p. 11; Kalb, *The Congo Cables* pp. 96-101; Andrew Tully, *CIA: Inside Story* (Morrow, New York, 1962) pp. 220-229

suggest that, while Washington was intimately involved, its collusion was borne once more out of a series of reactive intriguing in line with the Johnson administration's approach towards Congo throughout this period. Finally, a third section explores Mobutu's stick-and-carrot tactics to retain his at first tenuous hold on Congo. While the initial years of his rule exposed an authoritarian and ruthless leader with little interest in addressing the complex challenges actually facing Congo, even on the pages of contemporary intelligence reports, the United States enthusiastically embraced Mobutu and on several occasions moved to ensure his survival. The final sub-chapter thus explores the genesis of the rationale of supporting Congo's emerging despot in the name of pro-Western stability that would colour the US relationship with Congo throughout the Cold War, regardless of the cost to his subjects. As such, and a little paradoxically, it was out of the somewhat ill defined and reactive approach of the Johnson administration to Congo that Mobutu emerged as a cornerstone to American strategy towards the region for decades to come.

The Emergence of Congo's 'Big Man': The United States and Mobutu's Military Coup

Even before Mobutu's ascension to political prominence in Kinshasa the Simba rebellion was breathing its last gasps. The single greatest asset in quelling the Congolese revolt was undoubtedly the combined strength of the mercenaries and FAC, both paid for and equipped by the United States as has been seen. Having overcome problems of dwindling numbers and low morale towards the end of 1964 with Michael Hoare's recruitment drive in South Africa the following Spring, Godley remarked that by September 1965 the Fifth Column was the best trained and equipped it had ever been.¹⁷⁴ While the Cubans were a worry both to Hoare himself and the American embassy, Godley pointed out that the government forces still dominated the air and had the advantage of greater logistical flexibility beyond the area of immediate fighting. As a result, while encountering fiercer resistance than before, as the report of the Baraka siege indicates, the mercenaries continued to recapture town after town.¹⁷⁵ This alone would not suffice, however, as the embassy pointed out that Hoare's Column would not be enough to both pin down the

¹⁷⁴ Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 21st September 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

¹⁷⁵ CIA, 'Intelligence Report', 4th October 1965; Files of Edward K. Hamilton, Congo (B), Box 2, NSF, LBJL

Congolese bush and garrison the towns. As the ANC remained as ineffective as ever there was a danger that the rebellion would fester indefinitely. Success lay in isolating the rebels and by March the embassy reported that with the retaking of Aru, Aba and Wats the supply lines from Uganda and Sudan had been cut.¹⁷⁶ In the same vein, following requests from the Belgian Michael Struelens to this effect, the CIA organised eight patrol boats on Lake Tanganyika to cut off arms supplies from Tanzania.¹⁷⁷

This military success to isolate the rebellion was matched with a diplomatic effort to bring Congo's African neighbours inline. As the mercenaries continued their drive, the British government lent a hand in pressuring its former dependents in East Africa to cut their backing to the insurgents. In Congo too, Tshombe began to make the right noises at the OAU and the US was pleased to note the arrival of its Ad Hoc Commission at the beginning of 1965 and the participation of OAU election observers that spring.¹⁷⁸

Probably more important than Congolese politics, however, was the failure of the rebels themselves. As the rebels floundered so did the willingness of the various benevolent onlookers to continue their support. Indeed, the East German reports, by contrast to the American accounts, tend to focus more heavily on the shortcomings of the rebel movement than the military prowess of their mercenary foe. Throughout 1965, reports emanating from the East German embassies in Cairo in particular, but also in Dares Salaam, Moscow and Havana, describe meetings with representatives of the various rebel factions; each seeking to discredit the other, each claiming to be the true voice of the Congolese people and each looking to secure backing for its particular purpose.¹⁷⁹ In this way, Soumialot's entourage sought to tarnish Gbenye as insincere and in league with both Tshombe and the Americans while the latter's followers accused Soumialot of opportunistic corruption and personal enrichment at the expense of the rebel cause. The truth behind these accusations is uncertain but throughout the sense of suspicion of the

¹⁷⁶ Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 31st March 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

¹⁷⁷ Struelens was the Belgian government's public relations man and confidant of Tshombe's in Washington already during the 1960 Congo crisis. CIA Intelligence Memorandum, 'Tanzanian Support for the Congo Rebels' 7th April 1965, Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 87, NSF, LBJL; Memo for Record of Conversation with Struelens, 18th February 1965, Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL; Also see Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions* pp. 134-135

¹⁷⁸ There is considerable cable traffic between the British Embassy in Kinshasa and the Foreign Office urging Tshombe to adopt a more diplomatic stance towards the OAU and noting with satisfaction his invitation for Diallo Telli, its Guinean Secretary General, to visit Kinshasa in January 1965; 371/181808- Congo 1965, FO, Kew

¹⁷⁹ Microfiche 790, Aktenvermerke: Gespräch DDR Konsul in Kairo und Freiheitsbewegung im Kongo, 1963-67; MfAA, DDR

sincerity of their motives and the frustration of the inability of the rebel movement to unite is palpable amongst both the GDR officials and their Soviet partners.¹⁸⁰ Throughout the second half of 1965, then, material assistance from Congo's African neighbours began to dry up.¹⁸¹ Gleijeses compellingly tells the story of the Cuban column agonising over its role in Congo before abandoning their cause that October for similar reasons.¹⁸²

By the 6th January 1966, the GDR embassy in Cairo noted that even the Gbenye revolutionary government had pragmatically called for a cessation of the military struggle in order to guard their arms for a later time.¹⁸³ Perhaps the most pathetic image of the disintegration of the rebel movement into individuals trying to salvage some scraps of personal support can be found in a report of the fierce rural militia leader 'General' Olenga enlisting GDR embassy officials in Cairo to help pay his hotel bills and grant asylum to his wife and children in East Germany.¹⁸⁴ Thus, by the end of 1965 the rebellion had collapsed and the CIA report the following February accurately concluded, 'The insurgents' outside supporters, including Communist China and Cuba, have grown disillusioned with the erratic fighting qualities of the rebels and the perennial squabbling among rebel leaders. They have drastically reduced their aid, and Cuba at least has withdrawn most of its advisers.'¹⁸⁵ The combined might of the mercenary military prowess, the increasing isolation of the

¹⁸⁰ Certainly the criticism that Soumialot was looking to conduct his opposition from beyond Congo's borders casts doubt on his sincerity and the calls for aid from the various corners of the rebel camp after 1966 are nothing short of opportunistic attempts of personal enrichment. Even in the immediate aftermath of the Stanleyville intervention the Soviet Union remained skeptical of the true intentions of the fractious rebel leadership. A report from the GDR embassy in Moscow even reported the Soviet suspicion that the formation of the Stanleyville revolutionary government was an American plot to further split the rebels and divide the OAU. Aktenvermerk, 2nd December 1964, 'Gespräch zwischen Genosse Quilitzsch und Genosse Kurdjokow, stellvertretender Leiter der 2. Afrikanischen Abteilung in der MID, Moskau, 27 November, 1964', Microfiche C793/74, Gespräche mit Spezialisten und akkreditierten Diplomaten zur Lage im Kongo, 1960-62. 1964-66, 1969, MfAA, DDR

On 28th January 1966, a certain D. Bocheley introduced himself as the new legitimate president of a newly united CNL but both the GDR and Soviet officials cast doubt on the validity of his claims and his requests for assistance were ignored, Microfiche C791/74, 'Gespräche mit der Vertretung der Kongolesischen Freiheitsbewegung in Bamoko, Conakry, Dar es Salaam, Havana, Moskau, Prag, 1963-64; 1966-68; MfAA, DDR

¹⁸¹ On the 3rd February 1966, the Soviet ambassador Lutzki informed the GDR Vice Consul Hentschel in Dar es Salaam about Soumialot's failure to meet President Nyerere's demand to establish a workable rebel leadership and Tanzania's subsequent withdrawal of aid. Ibid.

Similarly in July 1965 the CIA reported that Uganda and Sudan, while continuing to harbor large numbers of rebels, was no longer providing arms to the Simbas. CIA Intelligence Memorandum, 'Situation in the Congo' 1st July 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 87, NSF, LBJL

¹⁸² Gleijeses *Conflicting Missions* pp. 150-155

¹⁸³ Minutes of meeting between E. German ambassador in Cairo, Dr. Scholz, and Gbenye's Foreign Minister, Major Wembo, 6th January 1966; Microfiche 790- Aktenvermerke: Gespräch DDR Konsul in Kairo und Freiheitsbewegung im Kongo, 1963-67; MfAA, DDR

¹⁸⁴ Minutes of meeting between Comrade Schmid and Olenga, GDR Embassy in Cairo, 7.12.1965, in Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ CIA Intelligence Memorandum, 'Situation in the Congo' 23rd February 1966; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

Simbas, as well as the inherent flaws of the disparate rebel movement itself ensured its ultimate failure. At the same time, however, further crisis was brewing in Congo.

Even as the rebellion was quieting fitfully in the provinces, political infighting in the capital resumed as the already tense relationship between the president and his prime minister soured further, giving Mobutu his chance at another power grab. Concerned as ever that a weakening central authority might reignite the rebellion, US policy makers initially did their utmost to maintain the status quo as Bundy wrote to Johnson that August, 'Since the current Kasavubu-Tshombe sparring started in earnest last February, we've been turning ourselves inside out to keep Kasavubu from firing Tshombe and to keep Tshombe from trying to take the presidency from Kasavubu.'¹⁸⁶ By autumn, however, American pressuring and backstage manoeuvrings had failed and the State Department's nightmares became reality as Kasavubu dismissed Tshombe from his position as premier. The NSC's Hal Saunders surmised that the American initiative failed because Kasavubu, who maintained his position by 'manipulating the leavers of tribal politics', simply wasn't 'sensitive to the kind of leverage we have' and 'couldn't care a less whether we cut aid or pull out some planes.'¹⁸⁷ In the immediate term this was viewed as a disaster. Indeed, a crisis appeared to be brewing as politics in Kinshasa took a turn towards the farcical with Kasavubu unable to win a majority for his candidate, Evariste Kimba, but unwilling to nominate an alternative. In a familiar sequence of events, just as in 1960 as two politicians were wrangling for power, Mobutu stepped in with a bloodless military coup on November 25th 1965. Unlike his timely intervention in 1960, however, this time there were no signs of his relinquishing power as he appointed himself president and his deputy, Col. Leonard Mulamba, as premier, initially for a five-year period. The question remains to what extent the United States and Mobutu's longstanding CIA contacts were integral to his sudden political ascension?

To be sure, early assessments of the ANC's Chief of Staff amongst American officials ahead of the coup were far from glowing and do not suggest that Mobutu's sudden rise was the culmination of a carefully planned long-term strategy in Washington. In the early months of the Simba rebellion he was characterised as vain, lazy, stubborn and indecisive, more of a problem than an asset in the ANC

¹⁸⁶ Bundy, Memorandum to the President, 25th August 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

¹⁸⁷ Saunders, Memorandum to McGeorge Bundy, 16th October 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

leadership.¹⁸⁸ At the end of May as the Simbas gathered momentum, the US military attaché chastised him for his gallivanting around Europe, saying that a commander-in-chief's place was with his troops 'not drinking wine in Rome or beer in Germany.'¹⁸⁹ More to the point, he was not all that malleable to the American position, consistently scuppering American efforts to 'Africanize' the security situation in Congo by refusing to let his ANC serve alongside other African troops. His Prince Hal-like 'redemption' appears to have come a mere two weeks later with the successful defence of Bukavu. Thus on June 19th, Godley reported enthusiastically, 'his demonstration of personal bravery and leadership, in reversing situation considered so desperate that resort to UN seemed essential, would appear now to have strengthened his place as key governmental figure,' and even went on to speculate over the plausibility of another Mobutu coup.¹⁹⁰ Following this the assessments begin to be more favourable and by 1965 Mobutu was viewed, by Godley at least, as a calming influence and source of moderation, in particular on Kasavubu.¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, Mobutu had not positioned himself as a prospective leader from the American vantage for long.

Nor did the telegram traffic between Washington and Kinshasa suggest that the coup was a long-devised strategy in Washington any more than the above consideration of Mobutu's personality. Indeed, as late as three days before his power seizure NSC staffer Robert 'Blow Torch' Komer wrote to Bundy deliberating on Washington's choice between Kasavubu and Tshombe, and siding with the latter.¹⁹² Similarly, Mobutu apparently gave no early indication of his intentions as Komer noted, 'Himself suspicious of Tshombe, Mobutu nonetheless thinks the Congo is safer with Tshombe in the premier post than out of it.'¹⁹³ In fact, in the earlier stages of the political crisis, Mobutu acted as a useful go-between for the US mission in Kinshasa in their efforts to reconcile president and premier, keeping in particular close contact with CIA Station Chief Lawrence Devlin. All this would seem to support Devlin's own line, adamantly denying any CIA role in Mobutu's decision

¹⁸⁸ For example, Harriman to Embassy, Kinshasa, 4th June 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

¹⁸⁹ Reported by Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 31st May 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

¹⁹⁰ Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 19th June 1964; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 81, NSF, LBJL

¹⁹¹ Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 8th October 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

¹⁹² Komer is better known for his role in the Vietnam 'Pacification' program and briefly stepped into Bundy's shoes as National Security Adviser to the president. Komer, Memorandum for Bundy, 22nd November 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

¹⁹³ CIA Intelligence Memorandum, 'Situation in the Congo' 26th August 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

to launch his coup in 1965 in his recent memoirs.¹⁹⁴ Just because it was not a long-conceived strategy, however, does not mean that the United States was not involved. In fact, the lack of a consistent and long-term policy is simply in keeping with Washington's entire approach towards Congo in this period.

While it is impossible with the evidence available to belie Devlin's claim outright, a relatively strong circumstantial case for US collusion in the coup can be put together from the documents at hand. As has been seen, Mobutu had strong ties with the US and the CIA in particular since 1960. Godley reaffirmed this point on the day of the coup stating that, 'Devlin is as close to Mobutu as any non-Congolese I know.'¹⁹⁵ Robert Komer too referred to exactly this in an offhand remark that more 'baksheesh' would probably be needed to retain Mobutu's support in the Kasavubu-Tshombe affair.¹⁹⁶ At the same time, American policy makers were in a quandary over the Kasavubu-Tshombe split. The US lacked the necessary leverage to control the president but backing Tshombe would have meant abandoning the longstanding policy of, at least overtly, backing the legitimate government. Initially, contacts with Mobutu were indeed to enlist him in the effort to maintain political unity. Nevertheless, as the political situation became more and more untenable, Washington began to look around for alternatives.

This unwillingness to permit the Congolese to work out their own political destiny is clearly borne out by a note from Komer to Harriman at the end of October,

'As the toughest Congo-fighter of them all, you're the one with whom I want to share my mounting worries... I feel it in my bones that, just as we close off the tag end of the last rebellion, we're sliding into another all too familiar political crunch that could tear the Congo wide open again... So without prejudice to our ultimate decision, wouldn't you agree that we should start contingency planning now to anticipate this problem. Otherwise we are at the mercy of the Congolese.'¹⁹⁷

Just as earlier the OAU was an inconceivable partner to Washington, the idea of leaving Congo's problems in the hands of its own politicians was simply not an option and the thinly veiled prejudices entailed in this assumption are again all too apparent. That US contingency planning was to include Mobutu is clear. In fact, on

¹⁹⁴ Devlin, *Chief of Station, Congo* p. 235

¹⁹⁵ Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 25th November 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

¹⁹⁶ Komer to McGeorge Bundy, 22nd November 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

¹⁹⁷ Komer to Harriman, 21st October 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

the 23rd November Saunders reviewed the situation in Congo for Komer and the NSC and, having weighed up the alternatives of inaction or supporting Tshombe, clearly recommended backing a Mobutu coup. Indeed, his exact words deserve some attention,

'3. We can back Mobutu. We could either back him in a coup or let him put together the best formula he can and get behind it. This is where I come out for the moment (as does Godley). He controls the army (with our help). He has shown himself the most sensible leader in the current mess. At the moment, he knows the ins and outs of the situation better than we do... I'd also recommend going back to the tougher line Godley recommended. With authority in hand to talk about the end of our aid, Godley should have a frank talk with Mobutu. This isn't radically different from what we're doing, but thinking this way does (a) make doubly important the case that will be made to [classified] and (b) focus our pressures on the guy who can accomplish most rather than hoping for too much from Kasa(vubu)...'¹⁹⁸

To be sure, the paper trail ends here and no firm orders for Godley to actually have this talk or reports to the same have been declassified. It is telling, however, that only two days before the actual event, on the 23rd November the national security aides in the White House and the ambassador in Kinshasa were considering the exact scenario that was to unfold. The very next day Mobutu called together the fourteen members of the army high command for an emergency session in Kinshasa and the coup was formally proclaimed and Mobutu endorsed as the new head of state by a summoned parliament on the 25th November. That the embassy was in extremely close contact with Mobutu during these critical days is borne out by a cable from Godley on the morning of the coups stating that an embassy officer (presumably Devlin) had gone to see Mobutu unobserved.¹⁹⁹ As a result, the high level of contact between Mobutu and American embassy officials combined with the almost prophetic contingency planning in Washington only days before the event suggest either an uncanny coincidence or, indeed, a deeper level of US complicity in Mobutu's rise to power than previously apparent.

On the day of the coup, Godley did not express surprise and Mobutu did not hesitate to stress that he was counting on his American allies.²⁰⁰ Furthermore,

¹⁹⁸ Saunders, Memorandum for Komer, 22nd November 1965; Files of Edward K. Hamilton, "Congo (B)", Box 2, NSF, LBJL

¹⁹⁹ Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, Washington, 25th November 1965; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

whatever the accuracy of the above inferences, that the US was at the very least indirectly involved in Mobutu's ascendancy is without doubt. Mobutu's powerbase was the army, which in turn drew its strength from the very tangible American military aid, as Hal Saunders had indicated. More generally, rather than a long-term strategy to consolidate its domination over Congo, the American collusion in Mobutu's coup was again borne out of short-term expediency and improvised manipulation. The fact that American officials worked hard initially to maintain the Kasavubu-Tshombe coalition in place flies in the face of any claim that the United States was deliberately looking to usurp the position of its Belgian ally in Congo. Once in power, however, the United States through its weight behind protecting and bolstering its man in Kinshasa thus eventually, and a little inadvertently, becoming the key foreign influence in Kinshasa.

With a Little Help from his Friends: the Early Years of Mobutism

The new president was fortunate that the rebellion was in its last gasps as has been seen, but he faced enormous challenges in trying to establish some measure of stability while ensuring his own survival in the revolving-door-politics of a country that had not been without conflict for more than a few months at a time since its independence. Mobutu set about this task with ruthless single-mindedness or, as British ambassador John Cotton put it, 'In his haste to set the Congo on the way to recovery of its prosperity and self-respect, Mobutu has proceeded with directness and vigour, limited only in considerations of self-preservation.'²⁰¹ Well aware of his increasingly tyrannical qualities, the United States continued its support and on various occasions moved to intervene directly upon his behalf and ensure Mobutu's survival. The insights of the British Ambassador offer a fascinating contemporary analysis of American policies as they unfolded and their implications for Congo. As such, the final years of the Johnson administration saw both the consolidation of Mobutu's growing authoritarian grip on the country and the genesis of the reasoning behind America's unerring support of the emerging despot, irrespective of the human cost of his rule, which would haunt Washington's Congo approach throughout the Cold War.

In the political sphere, immediately following the coup Mobutu put a nationwide ban on all political activity to put an end, in the CIA's words, to 'six years

²⁰¹ Cotton, Kinshasa to Foreign Office, 'Congo Republic: Annual Report for 1966', 17th January 1967, FCO 25/55, Kew

of intrigue that marked Congolese politics'.²⁰² He skilfully dealt with troublesome provincial politics by reducing the number of provinces and switching their governors, effectively undermining their local powerbases.²⁰³ In November 1966, Mobutu fired his long-term deputy Leonard Mulamba and simply absorbed the powers of the prime minister into his office. He also showed considerable cunning in dealing with potential political rivals as politicians were either so closely tied to the regime that they could barely present themselves as realistic alternatives, as was the case with his long term 'Binza' cohorts Bomboko and Nendaka, now Minister of Foreign Affairs and Transport respectively, or doomed to political exile, such as Adoula's appointment as ambassador in Washington and Mulamba in New Delhi.²⁰⁴ The following spring he created the Popular Revolutionary Movement (MPR) as Congo's sole political party, despite provisions for a two party system in the new constitution. By June 1967, a referendum approved this new constitution that essentially centralized power with the president. That patronage and corruption were to be his principle tools for ensuring loyalty was also clear from the appointment of his cousin, Jean Litho, as Finance Minister who according to Cotton, 'shocked with the blatancy of his corruption.'²⁰⁵ Thus, while pleased with his successful consolidation of power, it was hard not to note the increasingly authoritarian streak of Mobutu's leadership or, as one CIA report pointed out, within a few months of his takeover Mobutu was ruling by a 'mixture of decrees and wishful thinking'.²⁰⁶

Perhaps even more important in securing the new president's grip on power than these measures in the political sphere was the wave of violent repression that became a hallmark of the Mobutu regime. The very public execution of four would-be conspirators in Kinshasa in June 1966 left the population at large in no doubt about how opposition would be treated. Ambassador Cotton noted that the motives behind 'staging this barbaric farce' probably included his 'persecution mania' and 'a strong impulse to show himself to be a strong man.'²⁰⁷ Nor was violence directed only against open dissent as it also coloured politics at large. Disapproving of the election of Tshombe's former deputy, Godefroid Munongo, as governor of Katanga

²⁰² CIA Weekly Review, 'Mobutu and the Congo', 23 June 1967; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 87, NSF, LBJL

²⁰³ Cotton, Kinshasa to Foreign Office, 'Congo Republic: Annual Report for 1966', 17th January 1967; FCO 25/55, Kew

²⁰⁴ Ibid; Cotton, Kinshasa to Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart 'Reflection on the Political Stability of President Mobutu and his Regime', 20th August 1968; FCO 25/55, Kew

²⁰⁵ CIA, Memo, 'Situation in the Congo', 23rd February 1966, LBJL- NSF- Country File- Africa- Congo- Box 85

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Cotton to Foreign Office, 2nd June 1966; FO- 1100/26- Congo Internal Political Situation 1966, Kew

province, Mobutu simply had him arrested. Similarly, an overwhelming majority for the 1967 constitution was secured by methods ranging from 'fraud, open intimidation and violence in the Katanga and the lukewarm regions to the murder of the mayor of Matadi,' according to the British embassy.²⁰⁸ The results were clear and one CIA intelligence report summarised, not entirely critically, 'By draconian methods, including liberal use of the Sûreté and the ANC, he has gained far more control over the provinces than his predecessors enjoyed.'²⁰⁹ Thus, when asked to give an overall assessment of the Mobutu regime after its first three years Ambassador Cotton noted, 'by European standards it is not an attractive regime and as regards to repression it probably compares unfavourably with other similar dictatorships.'²¹⁰ The cynical racist implications of such a statement are clear when African standards were not seen as matching those of Europe, as if the former were not as deserving of fair and functional governance and the latter had not had more than its share of 'unattractive' regimes in recent history.

No doubt in an effort to match 'stick' with 'carrot', Mobutu also undertook a series of populist measures to secure a broader base of support. In an early prelude to the 'authenticity' program that was to follow in 1971, Mobutu began to espouse an increasingly nationalist line as well as a vitriolic campaign both against the former Belgian colonial masters and the persona of Tshombe himself, by now in exile in Madrid. This was the rationale behind renaming Leopoldville as Kinshasa in 1966. At the same time, Mobutu denounced the 'Contentieux Agreement' struck in February 1965 with its former colonial masters over Congo's assets and debts as gross treachery by Tshombe and the Belgian government. Tshombe was eventually sentenced to death in absentia in March 1967 and the Belgians, and foreigners in general, bore the brunt of xenophobic attacks during the turbulent days of 1967 when mutinous mercenaries threatened the regime.²¹¹ During this period of crisis Mobutu even turned on the foreign diplomatic corps, restricting the movements of foreigners and trying to shut down the channels of communications of outlying consulates.²¹² The fact that the Belgian government turned to American diplomats

²⁰⁸ Cotton, Kinshasa to Foreign Office, 'Congo Republic: Annual Report for 1967' 16th January 1968; FCO 25/55, Kew

²⁰⁹ CIA, Office of National Estimates, 'Implications of the Latest Congo Crisis' 4th August 1966, LBJL-NSF- Country File- Africa- Congo- Box 85

²¹⁰ Cotton to Stewart, 20th August 1968, 'Reflection on the Political Stability of President Mobutu and his Regime'; FCO 25/55, Kew

²¹¹ This culminated in the sacking of the Belgian embassy and the murder of seven Europeans on the streets of Congo's urban centres. Ambassador Cotton, Kinshasa to Foreign Office, London, 'Congo Republic: Annual Report for 1967', 16th January 1968; FCO 25/55, Kew

²¹² The fact that the United States alone was exempted from these measures caused considerable resentment amongst its European allies as is evidenced both by the cable traffic between the British

in Kinshasa for help in reigning in Mobutu's xenophobic campaign only serves to demonstrate how it was with the emergence of Mobutu at Congo's helm that Belgian influence in Congo had finally been supplanted by the United States.²¹³

Furthermore, these populist overtones spilled over into Mobutu's economic policies where, borrowing from one of Lumumba's earlier themes, Mobutu espoused a line of economic independence from foreign influence and made a direct attack on the Belgian grip on Congo's economy and resources. It was with this in mind that Mobutu pressured foreign businesses to move their headquarters to Kinshasa. When the Belgian mining giant Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (UMHK) refused to comply he simply moved to nationalise the company and expropriate its assets into the newly founded Congolese 'Gécamines' (La Générale des Carrières et des Mines) on the 31st December 1966.²¹⁴ Immediately this had a disastrous impact on the Congolese economy in the first two months of 1967 as UMHK protested the actions as illegal, froze copper exports and threatened to withdraw its workforce of some 1500 expert technicians. This would have left Mobutu in an untenable position and brought the Congo to its knees and a deal was worked out in which the Société Générale de Belgique, a thinly disguised substitute for UMHK, would continue to operate the mines for a substantial percentage of the revenue from mineral exports.²¹⁵ Ultimately, this allowed Mobutu to save face but placed UMHK in a better position than even the previous 'Contentieux' agreement had foreseen. While copper production now continued at previous levels, this debacle was not without consequences as the interruption of exports left Congo short of foreign exchange vital for meeting its import quotas and resulted in an overall decline in production, rising unemployment and a severe devaluation of the Congolese Franc.

Again Mobutu responded swiftly by simply replacing the Franc with a new currency in the form of the Zaire on the 24th June 1967, with an effective 330 per cent devaluation of the currency. He reacted to the corresponding rise in living expenses with simple statutory twenty-five per cent increase in wages the following October. Nevertheless, while these ill-thought out inflationary measures were certainly felt amongst the population at large, ambassador Cotton noted that

embassy in Kinshasa and London (see Cotton's 1967 Annual Report in *Ibid*) and the German ambassador von Müllenheim-Rechberg's memoirs, Entführung und Tod des Moïse Tshombe: Das Ende einer Hoffnung für den Kongo. (LIT, 1998) p. 55

²¹³ Telegram no. 184, Belgian Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel to Belgian Embassy, Washington, 8th July 1967; File 18293 II (d), Congo Départ a Ambabel Washington 1967, BDA

²¹⁴ In a similar vein, British insurance companies were simply nationalised. Cotton, Kinshasa to Foreign Office, 'Congo Republic: Annual Report for 1967', 16th January 1968; FCO 25/55, Kew

²¹⁵ At this time UMHK represented no less than 60% of Congo's entire exports and the industrial sector made up some 32% of Congo's entire GDP. David Renton, David Seddon and Leo Zeilig, The Congo: Plunder and Resistance (Zed Books, London & New York, 2007) pp. 120-21

Mobutu was able to escape serious damage through the fortuitous rise in world copper prices that coincided with his first foray into the realm of economic policy.²¹⁶ Ultimately, however, these initial years revealed the new president's reactive and short-sighted approach to economic matters or, as the CIA put it, 'An unsophisticated soldier, he has little grasp of economic and administrative details, and is impatient with political problems. He often acts impulsively, without weighing alternatives or consequences.'²¹⁷ That this flurry of activity was as much part of overt political posturing by the new leader as a sincere attempt at economic reform only serves to highlight Mobutu's willingness to risk the material welfare of the Congolese people when it came to ensuring his personal political survival.

The picture that emerges, then, is one of a leader with scant regard for the actual betterment of Congo and increasingly inclined to centralise authority around his own persona by draconian and at times inhumane means. More to the point, this was clearly apparent to contemporary observers and Washington policy makers in particular. Indeed, as Mobutu stumbled through the first eighteen months of office his survival was by no means guaranteed and, in his first annual report following the November coup, Ambassador Cotton was increasingly sceptical whether the 'good luck' that had kept him from disaster was set to continue.²¹⁸ More than good luck, however, Mobutu received an unqualified endorsement from the Johnson administration, no doubt a direct consequence of their relief of having a partner who seemed to at least stand a chance of exercising some semblance of control over this vast territory. When he faltered, the United States would be there to catch him and ensure his survival. This endorsement was reflected in US policy primarily in two ways. On the one hand, military and economic assistance continued uninterrupted, albeit tied to an IMF program. In addition, on three known occasions America intervened in Congolese internal affairs on behalf of Mobutu in order to assure his position at the head of the country.

In two separate incidents the CIA gained intelligence concerning potential coups to overthrow Mobutu. Both occurred within the first year of his presidency and on both occasions it was deemed appropriate to warn Mobutu of the potential

²¹⁶ Much of the above discussion on Mobutu's economic policies is taken from the British Ambassador Cotton's annual situation reports on Congo from 1966-68, FCO- 25/55. See also David Renton, David Seddon and Leo Zeilig, *The Congo: Plunder and Resistance* (Zed Books, London & New York, 2007) pp. 116-129; Jeanne M. Haskin, *The Tragic State of the Congo: from Decolonization to Dictatorship* (Algora Publishing, New York, 2005)

²¹⁷ CIA, Office of National Estimates, 'Implications of the Latest Congo Crisis' 4th August 1966; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

²¹⁸ Cotton, Kinshasa to Foreign Office, London, 'Congo Republic: Annual Report for 1966', 17th January 1967; FCO 25/55, Kew

threat to ensure both his political survival and his gratitude to the benefactor. The first incident is mentioned by Devlin in his memoirs and relates to four Congolese politicians plotting a coup in Kinshasa. According to Devlin, they included the foreign minister and three previously anti-Lumumbist politicians. As the plot thickened, he decided to tell Mobutu as, '... it was clearly not in the interest of the United States to have central government collapse or be debilitated to the delight of the Stanleyville (Kisangani) rebels.'²¹⁹ This is a little disingenuous as the rebellion had collapsed, there was no imminent threat facing Congo and nothing concrete to suggest that this coup would cause any more chaos than Mobutu's had done six months earlier.²²⁰ The four politicians involved in what would become known as the 'Whitsun Plot' were publicly hanged as has been mentioned earlier in this paper. This sequence of events is more or less corroborated by National Security Staffer Edward Hamilton's similar suggestion to reveal a supposed plot of Tshombe, with the backing of the South African government, to use a small number of mercenaries to overthrow Mobutu. On 13th July 1966 Hamilton wrote to Bundy's replacement, National Security Adviser Walt Rostow, 'Thus I agree to Palmer's suggestion that we very quietly give Mobutu the information we have (as we did six weeks ago when he stifled another incipient coup), and advise him to take precautionary steps to head the rebels off.'²²¹

Finally, the following year, when some two hundred mercenaries mutinied in eastern Congo, Mobutu and the United States were faced with an actual rather than potential threat. Some controversy remains over the motivations of the mercenaries; whether they were simply responding to irregular pay and diminishing supplies, reacting to Moïse Tshombe's kidnap and imprisonment in Algeria on the 30th of June or motivated by the corresponding desire to replace Mobutu's leadership.²²² Whatever the case, the towns of Kisangani, Bukavu, Kindu

²¹⁹ Larry Devlin, *Chief of Station, Congo* (Public Affairs Perseus Press, New York, 2007) pp. 236-7

²²⁰ Devlin also fails to mention that one of these politicians was the very same Jerome Anany who had previously been considered by US embassy officials themselves as a viable candidate for the country's leadership, as was noted earlier in this paper. Cotton, Kinshasa to Foreign Office, n, 1st June 1966; FO 1100/26- Congo Internal Political Situation 1966, Kew

²²¹ Joseph Palmer II was appointed Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs that year. Hamilton, Memorandum to Rostow, 13th July 1966; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL
NB. Ambassador Cotton also mentioned his strong suspicions that the American Deputy Chief of Mission Blake had passed on this information to Mobutu in a cable to Foreign Office, London on 2nd June 1966; FO 1100/26- Congo Internal Political Situation 1966, Kew

²²² The German ambassador von Müllenheim-Rechberg appears to have been of the former opinion (cable from Kinshasa to Bonn on 17th July 1967, B34- Band 703- Kongo Kinshasa, Kongo Krise & Söldner, Januar-Dezember 1967), while British Ambassador Cotton prescribed to the latter (Annual Report for 1967). Müllenheim-Rechberg came round to seeing the mercenary mutiny as part of a larger plot in his memoirs, 'Entführung und Tod des Moïse Tshombe: Das Ende einer Hoffnung für den Kongo.' (LIT, 1998) pp. 55-56

and Goma fell without resistance from the ANC to the mercenaries and some eight hundred former Katangan gendarmes in the first ten days of July. Combined with a campaign of industrial sabotage in Katanga, the Mobutu regime looked threatened once more. Thus, concerned by these developments and the fragility of its new found ally, the decision to agree to Mobutu's request for assistance by offering logistical support to the ANC appears to have been unanimously endorsed by Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Deputy Secretary of Defence H. Paul Nitze, CIA Director Dick Helms and the Joint Chief of Staffs.²²³ As a result, on July 10th the United States dispatched three C-130 airplanes, accompanied by 150 air service men, to ferry the ANC to and from the fighting.

This decision for renewed American assistance was motivated by three factors. First and foremost was the desire, whatever his shortcomings, to see Mobutu's reign continue in the hope of cultivating a pro-Western Congo. Beyond this, with Mobutu's populist rhetoric came a backlash against white civilians in Congo that was greatly exacerbated by the mercenary mutiny. By 7th July, seven Europeans had reportedly been killed in the streets around Congo following further government race baiting. As a result, the C-130s were effectively used as leverage to reign in Mobutu's inflammatory language and pressure the Kinshasa government to take measures to protect European and American lives in Congo.²²⁴ Finally, the US mission served an important diplomatic purpose as it seemed to heal some of the wounds of the earlier entanglements of the Johnson administration in Congo. The irony must have been plain to all, but by 1967 the United States was flying missions alongside Ghanaian and Ethiopian pilots against the same white mercenaries that had originally operated as American financed proxies to the condemnation of the same African nations. In order to gain the maximum political mileage and appease any domestic rumblings over further US commitments beyond Vietnam, ambassador McBride, Godley's replacement, ensured that a number of humanitarian missions were flown and the C-130s eventually joined the Red Cross (ICRC) mission before leaving in December.²²⁵ The official review of the C-130 operation was thus able to conclude, 'In retrospect, it appears that the quick

²²³ Rostow, 'Memorandum for the President: Help for the Congo', 6th July 1967; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 86, NSF, LBJL

²²⁴ Rostow, 'Memorandum for the President: Help for the Congo', 7th July 1967; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 86, NSF, LBJL

²²⁵ Rostow, 'Memorandum for the President: Help for the Congo', 12th July 1967; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 86, NSF, LBJL

despatch of the three C-130 planes was a skilful political investment.’²²⁶ In all three of the above cases then, whether the threat was military or political, the United States firmly backed its man. With regards to the mercenaries, having held out for the best part of half a year, they slipped over the border into Rwanda unopposed that December. In April 1968 a deal was brokered by the United States between the African Union and the Red Cross to have them flown to Europe and Rostow informed the President, ‘a stormy chapter has quietly closed in the Congo.’²²⁷

It is worth pausing briefly to further explore the United States’ unwavering support for Mobutu in the first years of his rule. As has been seen, the pages of the various assessments emanating from the State Department, CIA and American embassy reveal considerable anxiety both over Mobutu’s authoritarian leadership style, his ruthless and cruel repressive tactics, his complete lack of understanding of economic policies and his rash and erratic nature. On the last point, the American Kinshasa embassy’s Deputy Chief of Mission, Robert Blake, even consulted two doctors known to the president in this regard to gain assurances over Mobutu’s mental health and Godley blamed his eventual eviction from Congo on exactly this ‘inclination to fly off half-cocked’.²²⁸ The British ambassador Cotton concurred to this view describing his ‘persecution mania or paranoia’ and bouts of heavy drinking.²²⁹ Furthermore, while the political scene may have become slightly more predictable, contemporary onlookers were well aware that the fundamental problems of Congo remained essentially unresolved. Thus, a CIA intelligence report concluded two years after Mobutu’s coup, ‘All of the problems which have traditionally plagued the Congo still remain. Tribal conflict has been subdued, but mainly because of weariness and fear; basic antagonisms continue to ferment beneath the surface.’²³⁰ While these may have been ominous and clearly apparent warning signals for what was to come, at no point were they deemed sufficient to suggest a change in policy.

Indeed, the Johnson administration was relieved that finally a strong central force was emerging in Congo and more elaborate modernising strategies espoused by the president’s National Security Adviser elsewhere remained absent from the

²²⁶ H.J. Cohen, ‘Review of the C-130 Operation in the Congo’; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 86, NSF, LBJL

²²⁷ Cotton to Foreign Office, 2nd June 1966; FO- 1100/26- Congo Internal Political Situation 1966, Kew; H.J. Cohen, ‘Review of the C-130 Operation in the Congo’; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 86, NSF, LBJL

²²⁸ Blake, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 86, NSF, LBJL; Godley, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 18th March 1966, Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 85, NSF, LBJL

²²⁹ Cotton to Foreign Office, 2nd June 1966; FO- 1100/26- Congo Internal Political Situation 1966, Kew

²³⁰ CIA Weekly Review, ‘Mobutu and the Congo’, 23rd June 1967; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 87, NSF, LBJL

agenda.²³¹ Not only was Mobutu a willing ally but he also actually appeared able to exert some measure of control over this vast and divided territory, albeit with American backing. Despite its inherent warning, the very same intelligence report quoted above was coloured by a much more optimistic tone overall as it stated,

‘Although the Congo still faces hard times, its future looks brighter at present than at any time since independence... the central government is exercising reasonable control over disparate regional elements, and for the first time since independence seems to be directing or influencing events throughout the vast interior.’

Perhaps their readiness to see the emerging despot as the answer to their perceived Congo problem was understandable and it is not the purpose here to offer a teleological argument suggesting that American policy makers should have foreseen Mobutu’s thirty-two year rule of ‘state kleptocracy’ and sought to avert its disastrous consequences for Congo at this early stage of his career. Much rather, the commentary of the British ambassador makes plain that even with the information available at the time, a more nuanced approach readily suggested itself.

A telegram on the 22nd August 1967 from ambassador Cotton concerned with the direction US policy was taking with regards to the mercenary mutiny is particularly illuminating,

‘As we see the situation, although there is ample evidence that the Mobutu regime is quite unfit to govern the country, the Americans will continue to support him because of their obsession that, if he goes, a left wing administration will follow. They are therefore prepared to overlook the whole gamut of his misdeeds and the probability that there is even worse to come.’²³²

This assessment appears to be extremely accurate as is illustrated by Walt Rostow’s recommendation for the president to approve the C-130 Airlift in 1967,

‘There is little visceral satisfaction in helping Mobutu. He is irritating and often stupid. By our standards, he can be cruel to the point of inhumanity...There is no other Congolese leader in sight who stands a reasonable chance of holding the country together, much less maintaining the present friendly relations with us.’²³³

²³¹ Walt Rostow, *Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 1960)

²³² Cotton, Kinshasa to the Foreign Office, 22nd August 1967; FCO 38/126, Kew

²³³ Rostow, Memorandum for the President, ‘Help for the Congo’, 6th July 1967; Country File, Africa, Congo, Box 86, NSF, LBJL

The racist subtext of juxtaposing 'American standards' with the cruelty of the Congolese leader is again implicit.

Importantly, Cotton did not take issue with American backing of Mobutu itself, however, but with the unconditional nature of this support. As a result, he urgently recommended that any assistance should be tied to political reform, 'in my view the American solution of the mercenary problem no longer suffices in itself to cure the ills of the Congo. What is additionally required is the complete and urgent reform of sections of the central government and provincial authorities.'²³⁴ To be sure, it is unclear from the evidence at hand whether these demarches made it to Cotton's American counterparts. Considering the high level of cooperation, particularly over the mercenary issue and the fact that America requested British assistance in the airlift operation, it seems likely that these views would have been aired at some point, if in a watered down form. This American failure to tie their assistance to political reform, however, simply reflected a different set of priorities. While some of his failings may have been regrettable, viewed through the Cold War paradigm prevalent in Washington it was far more important to have a western oriented authority keeping a lid on Congo in the here and now than it was to develop a long-term viable strategy for the development of an independent, self-sufficient and prospering country for the future. Thus, a line of reasoning that would be criticised by academics and sustained by policy makers well into the nineties was born; Mobutu should be upheld and his shortcomings ignored because there was no immediately apparent Dauphin to replace him and chaos threatened without him.²³⁵ Ambassador Cotton clearly felt that the United States had a moral responsibility to use their leverage in exerting a positive influence on Congo's political destiny, not least because 'the Americans helped place Mobutu where he is and to maintain him there.'²³⁶ Unfortunately, neither the Johnson administration in Washington nor its diplomatic corps in Kinshasa shared this sentiment.

The result was clear. The United States had ensured the survival of their protégé and no attempts were made to curb his personal quest for power. By 1968 his position appeared unassailable. Cotton was under no illusions what this entailed for the Congolese people, 'The ordinary man in the street, and particularly those

²³⁴ He went on to name a number of characters in Congolese politics who needed to be removed from Mobutu's inner circle in an effort to create a more inclusive government. These included Information Minister J.J. Kande, head of the ANC General Bobozo, governor of Katanga Manzikale, the head of the Sûreté Mika and the Secretary General of the MPR Mungul Diaka. Cotton, Kinshasa to the Foreign Office, 22nd August 1967, FCO 38/126, Kew

²³⁵ Most notably, Schraeder, *Mobutu or Chaos*

²³⁶ Cotton to Stewart, 20th August 1968, 'Reflection on the Political Stability of President Mobutu and his Regime', FCO 25/55, Kew

who live in the capital and in the other big urban centres, are undoubtedly disillusioned with the regime and contrast their lot with the gross extravagance of the president and of his collaborators.’²³⁷ Nevertheless, he acknowledged the successful outcome of American policy over the past four years concluding,

‘In spite of these misgivings and the heart searching which is undoubtedly going on about the Congo and its President, it is my firm conviction that there is in fact no longer any satisfactory alternative to Mobutu and that, taking all the factors into consideration, he is probably as good a Chief of State as can be found in a country which has in the brief period of existence thrown up so many aspirants to power but who have as quickly relapsed into obscurity or been otherwise disposed of.’²³⁸

Thus, by 1968 the American mantra that Mobutu was the only viable alternative to anarchy in Congo had become a grim reality.

To summarise, having briefly examined the demise of the Simba rebels, this chapter has shown that there is considerable, if circumstantial, evidence to suggest a high level of US involvement in Mobutu’s power seizure. Subsequently, while intelligence reports and the assessments emanating from the Kinshasa embassy expressed considerable doubt over the effectiveness of Mobutu’s leadership, America embraced Congo’s new president and did all it could to sustain his grasp on power. On three separate incidents the United States actively intervened to ensure the survival of their ally. From the Cold War point of view of the Johnson administration, this appeared to make good strategic sense and some diplomatic ground could be regained following the 1964 debacle as America once more, and a little fortuitously, found itself on the right side of a fight against white oppression in the form of the mutinous mercenaries. Beyond this, however, a qualitative difference to the intrigues of the Lumumba years can again be noted in the assessment of this period. By November 1965 the rebellion was in its final throws, the Cubans had left and at no point did the Soviet Union show anywhere near the level of interest of the 1960-1 showdown, as US officials on both sides of the Atlantic were well aware. As a result, it is harder to see the immediate strategic need to again meddle in Congolese politics and these choices must be viewed critically. Furthermore, early warnings for what was to come in Mobutu’s reign were apparent to policy makers already at this early stage. This neither deterred the United States from its unconditional support nor did it cause it to use its

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

leverage in an effort to direct Congo's new leader in a more positive direction. Thus a line of reasoning was conceived in the final years of the Johnson administration that would tie America firmly to this questionable leader and haunt American-Congolese relations for the next 32 years; Mobutu was deemed the only viable and tested alternative to Congo once more descending into chaos. The Johnson years thus marked the beginning of a new era in US-Congolese relations.

Conclusion

Congo was, of course, never the most urgent priority for Johnson, more comfortable in domestic politics and increasingly weighed down by the burden of Vietnam. Nevertheless, time and again his administration deemed turmoil in this vast African interior worthy of renewed intervention. Indeed, a rather short sighted Cold War myopia dominated the American approach to Congo as a fear of potential communist exploitation coloured even accurate readings of the country's more parochial disturbances. Perhaps a degree of executive inattention also contributed to the failure to develop a coherent Africa strategy throughout his presidency. The result was a stream of short-term opportunistic manipulations to control the Kinshasa political scene and contain the spread of violence that filled Washington with apprehension. Responding to immediate events on the ground and a hodgepodge of opinions at varying times from its country team, its European allies and a few dominant voices in the State Department; this produced its initial support for Moïse Tshombé, the thinly veiled covert mercenary operations, the Kisangani intervention with Belgium, and, finally, Mobutu's power grab. Far from a long-term strategy, as was demonstrated both by its support for a Tshombé-dominated government and its initially critical view of Mobutu in 1964, it was this final development and Mobutu's sudden rise that also saw the United States begin to usurp the role of the former colonial masters as Congo's dominant foreign influence.

Again, while it is tempting to interpret American actions as long-standing and economically motivated plan to exploit Congo, a distinction should be made between American ambitions to dominate political outcomes in Congo and the continued hold of Belgian economic interests such as UMHK over the country's mineral resources. In other words and a little paradoxically, it was a policy of opportunistic meddling in line with American Cold War aims, while perhaps no less

imperial in its efforts to shape Kinshasa politics, that finally saw the United States displace Belgium as the key influence on Congo's elite. Nothing illustrated this more powerfully than Tshombe's swift demise and the desperate Belgian appeals to their American counterparts to reign in Mobutu's increasingly xenophobic campaigns against Congo's former rulers. While the entire administration in Washington appeared well pleased with its successful Congo intervention, early warning signs for the turbulent road ahead for its new Mobutu partnership abounded.

Congo itself appeared to breathe a sigh of relief as the rebellion shrunk away into the eastern bush and Mobutu restored a degree of calm to Kinshasa's tempestuous politics. Following five years of intermittent chaos and violence throughout the country whose greatest victims were ordinary Congolese, the restoration of a semblance of order was no doubt welcomed. Nevertheless, early indications of Mobutu's authoritarianism that painted a troubling picture for Congo's future were in ready supply. Almost immediately, the new president centralised power tightly in his own hands and displayed a willingness to use both violent repression and corrupt patronage to ensure his dominance. Equally troubling was his readiness to take crass economic measures to further his own political goals, indicative of a permanent neglect of the lot of ordinary Congolese that would characterise his regime. Of course, the full-fledged exploitation of Mobutu's 'state kleptocracy' was not yet visible, but the British ambassador's commentary and Walt Rostow's assessment cited earlier indicate that contemporary observers, and American policy makers in particular, were well aware of his shortcomings. Nevertheless, a combination of the cessation of violence and the fortuitous rise in copper prices ensured that even Congo was offered a brief respite in the early years of the Mobutu regime.

The impact of Mobutu's rise on American regional standing initially also lent itself to a tentatively optimistic appraisal. Of course, Mobutu's name was tarnished by his collaboration with Western forces during the turbulent years immediately following independence, and the murder of Lumumba in particular, as well as his willingness to resort to white mercenaries to bolster his floundering ANC. That said, during the early years of his rule Mobutu appears to have been moderately successful in wooing the OAU and positioning himself as a genuine African leader. No doubt his strident nationalistic rhetoric and virulent attacks on his former Belgian allies helped enhance these credentials. Most important from an American perspective, however, was the forceful ejection of the mutinous white mercenaries, formerly the mainstay of Mobutu's own military power, from eastern Congo. The

fact that American C-130s were flying alongside Ethiopian and Ghanaian pilots to defeat the hated white mercenary foe helped at least partially restore the tarnished American image, and Washington made the most of this slightly ironic diplomatic triumph. As such, not only did Mobutu appear to offer a modicum of stability for a pro-Western Congo, but this final episode during the last year of the Johnson administration also permitted the United States to reclaim some ground as the supporter of a 'moderate' African state.

Indeed, from the embassy and Congo country team, the State Department and Central Intelligence Agency to the White House; all corners of the Johnson administration seemed well pleased with their Congo intervention and it is hard to find a critical opinion amongst policy makers over the course taken. With the restoration of a measure of order to Congo, the Johnson administration proclaimed its successive interventions a well-executed success (having kept at bay the communist forces that by its own reckoning were never much interested in Congo during this latter period, at least until the popular outcry over the Kisangani intervention). Moreover, Mobutu had long enjoyed close ties to the United States and his gaze was firmly fixed on the West. Even into the present the CIA's Congo foray is often cited as an example of a Cold War success story in the Third World as a seemingly loyal ally was called into being. With a little more distance, these developments had a worrying side effect for the American position in the broader super power rivalry, however.

Having apparently grasped that black rights could no longer be contained in the domestic arena, Lyndon Johnson was singularly devoid of a vision for the clamour of African voices desperate to complete their continent's independence from white minority subjugation. Congo remained a symbol of neo-colonial meddling and superpower manipulation from its independence in 1960. Under Johnson, however, no attempt was made to deal with the country's very real and deep-rooted domestic problems, as the CIA itself noted, and regional organisations were bulldozed by an administration favouring short-term and clandestine manipulations for controlling renewed turmoil in Congo. Precisely these ad-hoc policies, however, first effectively defeated the Simba uprising and then played an integral role in the emergence of Mobutu and ensuring his survival as he scrambled to consolidate his rule. As such, a seemingly low-cost modus operandi of co-opting Congo's narrow elite in favour of a more fundamental engagement of the country's economic and political challenges was established and the emergence of Mobutu was greeted with relief and satisfaction, just as his self-serving agenda was becoming increasingly visible. Such

a superficial engagement was a far cry from a coherent strategy for a continent struggling with its independence and set a troublesome precedent for America's dealings with the region. With the arrival of Richard Nixon to the White House, however, this superficial reliance on the country's elitist leader was further formalised as a Cold War tactic in line with the 'Nixon Doctrine'. As such, it remains to be seen how the increasingly close ties between Mobutu and Washington forged during the Johnson years continued to define not only Congo's floundering development but also shaped the American agenda towards Africa.

3

**Follies of Grandeur:
Richard Nixon and Mobutu's Congo**

Against overwhelming odds, and with considerable help from his American backers, Mobutu had survived the turbulent 1960s and returned a modicum of peace and stability to Congo. If the crisis years were over, perhaps it was time for Congo to fulfil its much-anticipated potential? For Mobutu, however, this need not involve Congo's ordinary citizens whom he increasingly used as vassals in his quest for personal power and enrichment. Growing in stature and self-confidence as his first official term drew to a close, the increasingly assertive president began to force his own agenda in all facets of Congolese life with almost immediately disastrous consequences for the development of the country at large.²³⁹

Congo's metamorphosis into the peculiarly Mobutist form of a totalitarian state coincided with the arrival of the Nixon-Kissinger team in the White House. Just as Lyndon Johnson saw himself as a domestic reformer, Richard Nixon sought to portray himself as a masterful statesman whose presidency would revolutionise the American approach towards foreign policy and usher in an era of peace and stability. He was joined by the lauded Harvard academic, Henry Kissinger, as his National Security Adviser. The antagonism of these two egos that jealously guarded foreign policy as the sole domain of the White House (an arrangement that was formalised with Kissinger occupying the dual positions of National Security Adviser and Secretary of State from September 1973) makes for a dramatic study in itself.²⁴⁰ Focused on developing grand strategies to extract the United States from the Vietnam War, deal with renewed violence in the Middle East, find a *modus vivendi* with the Soviet Union in the much-vaunted *détente* and develop a rapprochement with China, the pair was seemingly united in their failure to refine the American approach towards Africa.²⁴¹

Rather than simply lacking strategic appeal, two main reasons suggest themselves for this apparent disregard. First of all and perhaps most obviously, despite the remaining white minority governments in southern Africa and simmering troubles in the Portuguese colonies, no sudden crisis demanded their immediate attention during Nixon's first term. Perhaps equally important, however, was the emergence of the Congolese dictator to seemingly fit perfectly into Nixon's vision of harnessing and strengthen regional powers as bulwarks against

²³⁹ Two texts stand out for a discussion on the evolution of Mobutu's oppressive regime are Schatzberg, *The Dialectics of Oppression in Zaire* and Crawford Young and Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State*. See also Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo From Leopold to Kabila*

²⁴⁰ See, for example, Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford University Press, 2004); Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (Harper Collins, 2008); Richard Reeves, *Richard Nixon: Alone in the White House* (Simon Schuster; NY & London, 2001)

²⁴¹ Frederick Logevall and Andrew Preston (eds.), *Nixon and the World; American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (Oxford Uni. Press, 2008)

communist subversion (the 'Nixon Doctrine'). Mobutu, for his part, was more than willing to play the role of the loyal and trusted ally in return for continued favours from Washington. The return to a semblance of order in Congo was viewed as the triumphant conclusion of a strategy that had successfully contained the crisis spreading through Congo in the mid 1960s. Much was left to do if Congo was to continue its path towards stability and prosperity, however. Far from cultivating Congo further, their preponderance to view the South as peripheral to their grand strategies and only important in terms of preserving stability and American credibility around the world ensured that the Nixon-Kissinger team viewed Congo strictly in terms of its posturing in the global arena and utterly failed to engage their African protégé's growing domestic transgressions.²⁴²

This third chapter thus divides into two parts. A first section considers the internal developments in Congo in the creation of the authoritarian Mobutist state filtered through the lens of contemporary American intelligence. This reveals that, even at the time, US observers were well aware of the many alarming turns Mobutu's growing megalomania was taking; from his subversion of the first genuine national elections and the creation of a single party state, his crass foray into mass political mobilisation with the 'Authenticity' and 'Zairianisation' campaigns, to the rampant corruption of an institutionalised system of patronage and the ever-present threat of violence of a repressive security apparatus. At the same time, however, these often detailed and accurate appraisals did not translate into a more critical American stance towards its Kinshasa ally. A second section thus explores the American policy reaction to these precarious developments in Congo. Not only did military assistance continue, unchecked even by the stark warnings of the IMF over Mobutu's increasing economic mismanagement, but the White House also went considerably further. Kinshasa's despot received a full presidential endorsement, meeting Nixon on two separate occasions, and Washington proved instrumental in encouraging a growing interest from American businesses looking for investment opportunities in Congo to garner favour with Mobutu. This willingness to harness the private sector to the administration's foreign policy goals was an important component of the system of state corruption that came to haunt Congo. As such, during the Nixon years the United States proved

²⁴² For discussion of the dismissive Nixon-Kissinger approach towards the Third World see, for example, Jussi M. Hahnimäki, 'An Illusive Grand Design' in Frederik Logewall and Andrew Preston, *Nixon and the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (Oxford University Press, 2008) and Mark Attwood Lawrence, 'Containing Globalism: The United States and the Developing World in the 1970s' in Nial Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela and Daniel J. Sargent (eds.), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press; Cambridge MA, 2010)

a key and willing ally in the development of Mobutu's repressive 'State Kleptocracy' and it was no coincidence that Mobutu laid the foundations for Congo's state collapse during this period.

From Roar to Whimper: Mobutism Asserted in Congo

As the first decade of Congolese independence and President Mobutu's inaugural term drew to a close, Congo appeared to be settling into a period of relative political stability and a tentatively hopeful eye could indeed be cast towards a more prosperous future for Congo for the first time since 1960. Between 1967 and 1970 the Congolese economy grew by an estimated ten per cent annually following massive increases in the world copper price.²⁴³ On the political front, while undoubtedly fraudulent and illegitimate, the elections of 1970 appeared to at least confirm Mobutu's personal popularity with the Congolese population at large as the president was credited with the relatively positive developments of the past five years. The American ambassador in Kinshasa, Sheldon B. Vance, summarised these sentiments as follows, 'Economic conditions in his [Mobutu] five years in power have improved a great deal, and stability, safety and order- especially in the interior- have been restored. Citizens who are at all informed tend to give him credit for bringing them about.'²⁴⁴ Thus, 1970 appears to have been the high watermark for post-independence Congo and the American country team and the wider Congolese population viewed the future with considerable expectations. Rather than a genuine effort towards political and economic development, however, the subsequent years would see Congo descend into a quagmire of political patronage, repression and economic folly. Perhaps the first half of the 1970s, then, was the most significant turning point in the history of Congo's failed development in the post-independence period, as optimism was gradually replaced with the increasingly assertive personality cult of President Mobutu and his whimsical and at times foolhardy policies.

To suggest that all was well in Congo by 1970 would be an overly sanguine and inaccurate portrayal of the state of the country, however. Indeed, while no longer a significant threat to the regime in Kinshasa, the pattern of sporadic and localised rebellion against government authority coupled with a heavy-handed, brutal and ineffective response from the national army continued from the previous decade.

²⁴³ Nzongola-Ntalaja, *'The Congo: From Leopold to Kabila, a People's History'* p. 148

²⁴⁴ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, Washington D.C. 'Monthly Economic Review', 17th December 1970; RG 59, Economic, Box 1116, Department of State, National Archives, College Park, MD (hereafter NARAI)

The American consulate in Bukavu offers compelling accounts of continued insurgent marauding, ANC atrocities and the suffering of a civilian population caught between the two in the Kivus during the early part of the decade. In part these were a continuation of local grievances and banditry, while a slightly more sophisticated or at least organised rebel movement under Laurent Kabila, the latter day president protecting an apparently lucrative gold and ivory business, also continued to operate in the remoter areas of the eastern provinces.²⁴⁵ Thus both the national army and various rebel factions were essentially 'petty thieves' preying off the local population in a depressing pattern that survives into twenty-first century Congo.²⁴⁶ Neither foreign powers nor the Congolese government appear to have made any sincere effort to influence either side or bring this lingering situation under control as the American Consul in Bukavu, Raymond Seitz, summarised barely half a year after the much vaunted elections of 1970,

'As with most similar situations, it is the people in the two territories [North and South Kivu] who suffer most... The road north of Fizi is a string of burned out villages, some decimated by the rebels and others by the military... Whatever the case, the population has lost its homes, tools, and way of life... The region is in Bosch-like limbo, and for the people who try to live there, a nightmare to which they have become strangely accustomed.'²⁴⁷

Not only does this quotation illustrate the on going misery of the local population and the apparent neglect of the Kinshasa government to the festering situation in parts of the provinces, but it also demonstrates a remarkably detailed and candid reporting of the American country team. More than simply a hangover from a turbulent period, the unceasing exploitation of an abused populace in the more disparate parts of the country was an early indication of a government both inept at administering to the actual needs of its citizens and uninterested in pursuing anything but the designs of the narrow elite defined by Mobutu and his chosen and constantly shifting circle in Kinshasa. Indeed, it was this feature of an increasingly authoritarian and self-serving government that would dominate

²⁴⁵ Seitz, Bukavu to Secretary of State, 'Kivu: Secteur Tanganika: Rebels and Soldiers', 31st July, 1971; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAII

The French ambassador described a similar isolation of the provinces. Ambassadeur Claude Chayet, Kinshasa, 'Rapport de Fin de Mission', 15 Décembre 1972; Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Rapport de Fin de Mission de l'Ambassadeur, Carton 14, Centres Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (hereafter CADN)

²⁴⁶ See reports from ICG, HRW, MONUSCO

²⁴⁷ Seitz, Bukavu to Secretary of State, 'Kivu: Secteur Tanganika: Rebels and Soldiers', 31st July, 1971; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAII

Congolese politics during the Nixon administration and shape the future of the country into the present.

The most immediately apparent manifestation of Mobutu's intentions was the process of the national elections itself as his official five-year term drew to a close. No doubt the prospect of a more democratic government presented a dilemma for Congo's leader and his American allies, fearful of a dilution of power and a return to the chaos of the early 1960s. Nevertheless, Mobutu remained overtly committed to holding elections and Congo's elite at least harboured genuine hope for a more inclusive political system by 1970. The process that actually unfolded that year ensured that any initial enthusiasm was short lived and a sincere move towards popular participation remained untried, however. National Assembly candidates were selected from above by the Kinshasa government according to party loyalty rather than genuine positions of community stature or popular renown, Mobutu remained the sole candidate for the presidency and voters could simply affirm or reject the list of National Assembly candidates and president with a green or red ballot respectively. American intelligence reports from Kinshasa and the various provinces indicate that clumsy efforts of mass mobilisation by the Party (MPR), ranging from excessive rhetorical hyperbole- such as Kinshasa's governor comparing Mobutu to Jesus and his mother to the Virgin Mary in a radio address - to implicit intimidation and cajoling, failed to impress the bemused populace and at times had quite the opposite effect.²⁴⁸

Overall, the results of the fraudulent 1970 elections in which Mobutu won a predictable and overwhelming endorsement (of up to a one hundred per cent 'green endorsement' in some areas) were twofold.²⁴⁹ On the one hand, they simply underlined the extent of Mobutu's personal grip on Congolese politics, with the extension of another seven-year presidential term flanked by a largely 'advisory' National Assembly whose makeup signalled a remarkable continuity from the previous five years and did little to represent the provinces they were selected to stand for. As such Ambassador Vance noted,

'An opportunity for President Mobutu to demonstrate his genuine popularity and to enter on his new seven-year mandate enjoying the increased confidence

²⁴⁸ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Election Campaign 1970: The Greening of the Congo', 29th October 1970; Strand, Kisangani to Secretary of State, 'Profile of Orientale Province National Assembly Candidates', 14th October 1970; Seitz, Bukavu to Secretary of State, 'Kivu before the elections', 26th October 1970; Neher, Lubumbashi to Secretary of State, 'Elections in Katanga', 6th November 1970; all in RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAI

²⁴⁹ Legationsrat Karl Th. Praschke to Bonn, 'Präsidenten Wahlen im Kongo', 14 Oktober 1970; Band 815, Innenpolitische Berichte von Kongo, Kinshasa, , B34, BRD

of the Congolese people has been far from fully utilized as a result of an excess of zeal on behalf of the October 31st-November 1st Presidential elections.²⁵⁰ This not only demonstrated the unwillingness of the regime to contemplate a more inclusive politics but also a marked Mobutu's failure to harness the popular goodwill he did enjoy throughout much of the country at the end of his first term.

The one sided nature of the election process ensured that Mobutu now assumed personal responsibility for Congo's progress towards modernity. Various reports from American consulates in the provinces and the embassy itself illustrate how, exasperated with corrupt officials and the inefficacy of their government, ordinary citizens increasingly looked to Mobutu personally, not yet associated with these governmental shortcomings, to secure a path towards political and economic development for Congo and meet the growing aspirations of its population.²⁵¹ These sentiments were perhaps most clearly articulated in a report on the aftermath of the elections in Kivu from Consul Seitz, 'The good things that have happened in the last few years, particularly a steady peace, are identified with Mobutu while the bad things are identified with his government.'²⁵² Ambassador Vance noted a similar sentiment in Kwilu, 'The people of the Kwilu do not look to the politicians or the National Assembly for help; they look only to the President.'²⁵³ Furthermore, throughout 1970 it had become abundantly clear that the dubious but elaborate electoral process was, in Vance's words, simply 'designed to ensure that all real power continues to flow from a single source, the president.'²⁵⁴ As a result, in the eyes of the Congolese, Mobutu had staked his personal prestige and popularity on fulfilling the increasingly hopeful outlook for Congo at the turn of the decade. A failure to come to terms with the more pressing needs of his citizens would therefore directly impact the president's own standing and his image soon began to tarnish.

Indeed, the above analysis indicates that American observers were well aware of Mobutu's subversion of the political process and the risks entailed therein for his personal standing and the regime at large. Far from critical, however, this

²⁵⁰ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Congo Presidential Elections: An Assessment', November 4th 1970; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAII

²⁵¹ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, Washington D.C., 'Dini on Prospects for Congolese Economy', 2nd July 1970; RG 59, Economic, Box 787, Department of State, NARAII

²⁵² Seitz, Bukavu to Washington DC, 'Kivu: the View from the Bleaches', 15th March 1971; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAII

²⁵³ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'The Greening of the Congo as seen from Kwilu', 10th December 1970; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAII

²⁵⁴ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'The Congo Post Elections: An Assessment', 11th February, 1971; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAII

seemingly accurate reading of Mobutu's increasingly authoritarian streak was couched in relativizing and accepting overall tenor of these very reports. In precisely this way Consul Strand, having described the mockery of the 1970 election debacle in the Kisangani region, continued with the much more optimistic conclusion that, 'Viewed not as an exercise of choice, however, but as an act of allegiance or a swearing of fealty to Mobutu, the paramount chief, it did constitute a significant act of participation.'²⁵⁵ Ambassador Vance also tempered his assessment along these lines, 'As contrived and as circumscribed as the coming elections may be, they represent a necessary first step if the Congo is to move toward political activity on a national scale and away from tribal and regional based politics.'²⁵⁶ The racist undertones of these statements are again plainly visible, as if 'tribal' Africa could do no better than rely on a strong 'chief' to administer its territories.²⁵⁷ Moreover, these assessments were an early indication of a readiness to dismiss the more sinister aspects of Mobutu's rule. Thus, having reinforced his grip on the levers of power with a duplicitous election, it remains to be seen how the 'paramount chief' would actually set about shaping Congo's much anticipated future and the impact this had on his popular standing.

As a result, pressure was mounting for the president to deliver on Congo's much touted economic promise.²⁵⁸ Already by 1970, however, warning signals were clearly being sounded by experts familiar with the details of the Congolese economy. The country was fast falling into what development economists now commonly label the "resource trap" of poverty.²⁵⁹ In other words, high rents from copper production by the turn of the decade, while presenting a Potemkin village of prosperity in Kinshasa, were simply being siphoned out of the country without any real investment into the much needed infrastructure and rural development in the provinces. Thus, Lamberto Dini, the Italian economist and latter day prime minister heading an IMF mission to Congo in May 1970, gave an extremely sombre long-term prognosis already at this time based on exactly this drain of resources,

²⁵⁵ Strand, Kisangani to Secretary of State, 'What do the elections mean?' 16th November 1970; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAII

²⁵⁶ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, Washington D.C., 'Congo Elections', 12th February 1970; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAII

²⁵⁷ Nor was this a purely American phenomenon, of course, and reports of the W. German embassy revealed a similar appraisal of the fraudulent elections as a useful exercise in legitimization and rejecting the application of 'Western democratic norms' to Congo. Prashcke, Kinshasa to Bonn, 'Wahlkampf im Kongo', 14th October 1970 and Prashcke, Kinshasa to Bonn, 'Präsidenten Wahlen im Kongo', 7 November 1970; Band 815, Innenpolitische Berichte von Kongo, Kinshasa, , B34, BRD

²⁵⁸ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'The Kwilu: A Case Study in Contemporary Congolese Politics', 17th September 1970; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAII

²⁵⁹ Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion* (Oxford University Press, 2008)

'The chief element in the longer-term outlook was gross misallocation of Congolese resources. The country has little to show for the vast sums purportedly spent on investment... There is no investment to offset the depletion of natural resources like copper. Instead of building up productive capacity, the proceeds of copper and other exports go to the maintenance of the enormously expensive political structure, far more costly than that in similar countries.'²⁶⁰

Reports emanating from the various US consulates in the provinces confirmed this economic stagnation, neglect and the failure of the Kinshasa government to fulfil its promises for development at the turn of the decade.²⁶¹

Nevertheless, many Congolese as well as Ambassador Vance himself now hoped for Mobutu to take the country into a new direction as he embarked on his second term in office.²⁶² Unfortunately for the people of Congo, however, there would be no marked departure from the follies of the early years of the Mobutu regime. Indeed, the policies that unfolded can best be described as a continued and ever increasing misallocation of resources and an endemic institutionalised top-down corruption that would destroy all prospects for development. The previous chapter described how American intelligence reports had little regard for Mobutu's grasp of economic matters and throughout his presidency it became increasingly clear that he preferred very visible prestige projects to concentrating on the more mundane details of rural development. Thus, at the very time when copper prices were falling and Congo was beginning to have considerable budgeting and balance of payment problems, the president preferred to allocate much needed capital to his penchant for military equipment and infamous white elephant projects such as the Inga Dam, the Inga-Shaba power line and the twenty-two-story conference centre and MPR party headquarters at Nsele (the monstrous dimensions of which were eloquently described by Norman Mailer in his Kinshasa visit in 1974); rather than allocate funds for reviving the country's infrastructure and much needed transport links to bring its vast hinterland out of economic isolation.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Dini on Prospects of Congolese Economy', 2nd July 1970; RG 59, Economic, Box 787, Department of State, NARAII

²⁶¹ Strand, Kisangani to Secretary of State, 'Orientale: Rehabilitation Program Fiasco', 15th February 1971; Seitz, Bukavu to Secretary of State, 'Kivu: the View from the Bleaches', 15th March 1971; Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'The Kwilu: A Case Study in Contemporary Congolese Politics', 17th September 1970; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAII

²⁶² Vance, Kinshasa, 'Monthly Economic Review', 19th November 1970; RG 59, Economic, Box 788, Department of State, NARAII

²⁶³ Inaugurated in November 1972, this hydroelectric dam was to make the mining region of Katanga dependent on the government for power through the Inga-Shaba power line from the Inga Dam in Western

A reported conversation between American Consul Strand in Kisangani and Minister Yvon Bonghoy, charged with the development of Orientale Province, demonstrates not only exactly such foolhardy investment priorities but also illustrates the extent to which the population at large was becoming increasingly aware of the government's willingness to squander funds that might have been put to better use. According to Bonghoy, less than ten per cent of the six million dollars pledged by the president personally for this region's development in 1969 had actually been made available by the time of his departure from office in December 1970. The majority of the promised capital had been redirected to items ranked higher on the presidential budget, 'principally the plush convention-resort complex built for MPR conferences at N'Sele near Kinshasa...' While recognising that a certain amount of 'self-serving embellishment' from the exiting Minister may have coloured this recounting, Strand concluded his report with the candid assessment, 'A perhaps questionably devised public works program, but one that would have met real economic and social needs in a badly depressed province of the country, has been shunted aside to make way for prestige projects and political expenditures. This kind of trade-off is recognised and resented here, not only by the educated elite but also by unlettered villagers, who hear quickly enough about such excesses of conspicuous consumption as N'Sele.'²⁶⁴

In other words, Mobutu dictated investment priorities personally and his focus was far removed from the genuine needs of the country or its citizens.

More than simply fiscally irresponsible, this drain on the government's budget was further expounded by the unbelievable level of state corruption that became institutionalised in Mobutu's system of governance. The IMF's Lamberto Dini had already noted the president's personal pilfering of the state coffers in his May 1970 assessment, estimating that his private spending for 1969 accounted for more than sixty million dollars of the annual budget.²⁶⁵ The following years would see regular public pronouncements declaring ever-tougher measures against corruption and the firing of key ministers for apparent abuses. The plain truth that emerged, however, was that corruption was more than simply an unpalatable side effect of a heavy-handed authoritarian regime. It was a necessary part of Mobutu's system of

Congo, just north of Kinshasa, to Shaba province. Ambassador Vance, *Monthly Economic Review*, December 28th 1972; RG 59, Economic, Box 788, Department of State, NARAII

Norman Mailer, *The Fight* (Penguin Books; London, 2000- 1st published 1975) p.19

See also Benoit Verhaegen, "Les Safaris Technologiques au Zaïre," *Politique Africaine*, 18 (June 1985)

²⁶⁴ Strand, Kisangani to Secretary of State, 'Orientale: Rehabilitation Program Fiasco', 15th February 1971; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAII

²⁶⁵ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Dini on Prospects for Congolese Economy', July 2, 1970; RG 59, Economic, Box 787, Department of State, NARAII

governance. Power was tightly centralised with the president personally and he bought off potential detractors by sharing out pieces of the pie and regularly replacing those in key positions. Thus Vance noted, 'Any incipient dissident is kept in check mainly by massive doses of presidential largess.'²⁶⁶ Much as one would imagine a medieval court, factions competing for their share in Congo's riches were played off against each other in their effort to secure a portion of the presidential hand outs. They, in turn, would ensure their own position by similar means creating a top-down institutionalised system of patronage as the very mechanism for ruling Congo.

The much-vaunted 'Zairianisation' of foreign owned businesses, coinciding with the 1973 oil shock and corresponding downturn in world copper prices at a time of global economic stagnation, should also be seen in exactly the above light. The nationalisation of foreign enterprises was, of course, nothing new for a Third World country looking to break the economic stranglehold of foreign capital and Patrice Lumumba had hinted already in this direction in 1960.²⁶⁷ Mobutu's strategy was all together more cynical, however, as he simply sought to replace foreign entrepreneurs with his own cohort of profiteers in another round of patronage.²⁶⁸ Thus, on November 30th 1973, he announced the expropriation of foreign held small-businesses and agriculture and decreed that future mineral concessions would have to be at least fifty per cent Congolese owned.

Reports from the American embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission in Kinshasa, Michael H. Newlin, indicated that theses presidential edicts was suitably vague on who was to benefit from the new business-seizures to cause 'great and widespread expectations' and give Mobutu sufficient flexibility to not only extend his personal control over the economy but to use this to ensure the loyalty of an eagerly anticipating entourage.²⁶⁹ On 26th December, the president announced that due to their 'strategic importance' the enterprises would be reserved for his 'close

²⁶⁶ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, Washington D.C., 'The Congo Post Elections: An Assessment', 11th February, 1971; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAII

²⁶⁷ Jan van Lierde (ed.), *Lumumba Speaks: the Speeches and Writings of Patrice Lumumba* (Little, Brown & Co.; Boston, 1972); Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo: from Leopold to Kabila, a People's History* (Zed Books; London & New York, 2002) pp. 147-51

²⁶⁸ The annual report of the East German Embassy in Kinshasa for 1974 noted exactly this dichotomy between the espoused anti-imperial nature of Zairianisation and its actual effect of exacerbating inequality in the elitist distribution that followed. Botschafter Weidemann, 'Jahresbericht 1974', Jan 1975; Jahresberichte der Botschaft der DDR in Zaire für 1973-76 über die Innen- und Außenpolitik Zaires sowie über die Beziehungen der DDR zum Gastland, Politisches Archiv, Abteilung Ost und Zentralafrika, Mikrofiche C6242, MfAA, DDR

²⁶⁹ Redistribution would go to Congolese according to their 'ability to operate the enterprise' and 'solvency'. Newlin, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Tension Between Mobutu and Armed Forces', 11th January 1974; NSC, Institutional 'H' Files, Box H-216, Richard Nixon Presidential Material, College Park, MD (hereafter RN)

collaborators'. Initially the civil service and armed forces were to be disqualified from a portion in the new wealth but, after some grumbling, a telegram a few months later confirmed that, 'subsequently it became evident officers had not been excluded from sharing spoils in redistribution of small businesses. Wives, relatives and friends of at least some top-ranking officers have been beneficiaries.'²⁷⁰ In other words, moving the above-described institutionalised corruption to a new level, as the Congolese economy was sagging Mobutu sought to buy security for his regime by seizing private businesses and portioning out the spoils according to loyalty to him personally. Furthermore, this ill-devised scheme was executed without particular regard or forethought to its impact on the productivity of the Congolese economy.

The actual results were predictably disastrous. The Congolese budget was facing mounting balance of payment issues throughout the early 1970s, expounded by falling copper prices from April 1970 and issues of capital flight as the corrupt elite amassed private fortunes beyond Congo's borders. At a time of a declining gross domestic product, the country's infrastructure was falling into disrepair and much needed investments into the provincial economies were cut at the expense of Mobutu's pet prestige projects and bloated 'administrative' costs. Even more worryingly, the 'Zairianisation' program ensured that nervous foreign shop owners withdrew capital and no longer replenished stocks causing both widespread food shortages and correspondingly massive price hikes at a time of growing unemployment. The mismanagement that followed the expropriations by new owners ill-equipped to run the inherited businesses, and often more interested in withdrawing as much capital as possible in the short-term than developing sustainable enterprises, only further exacerbated these problems.²⁷¹

Commenting on their effects in the immediate aftermath of the 'Zairianisation' measures, the American consul in Lubumbashi, Lewis Junio, described precisely such developments warning that, 'the high level of disruption is an accurate indication of the validity and size of the problem President Mobutu is wrestling.' The report went on to note that, while foreigners would clearly be hurt, it was the local Congolese population who would be hardest hit, '... If unemployment rises, the distribution system deteriorates, food shortages intensify, all of which seems a fair

²⁷⁰ Newlin, American Embassy Kinshasa to Department of State, Washington D.C.; 9th March 1974; NSC, Institutional 'H' Files, Box H-216, RN

²⁷¹ In addition to the American reports cited, the French Consul in Lubumbashi, Yves Bernard, offers compelling accounts of the stagnating effects of the Zairianisation measures on Congo's economy. 'Le Shaba et le recentes mesures economiques', 23rd December 1973 and 'Fevrier 1972 au Shaba', 6 March 1974; Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Kinshasa, Ambassade, Carton 45, CADN

bet at this point, it will be the native populace which will be more disadvantaged than the residual foreign community.' At least from the vantage of the reporting consulate, these were extremely worrying developments that could potentially even throw the country back into civil strife and violent unrest.²⁷² As the economy slumped, Mobutu responded with a further round of 'nationalisation' under the banner of the 'Radicalisation of the Revolution' in December of the following year that again benefited his cronies, now as managers of state enterprises, with exorbitant salaries, embezzled funds, kickbacks and expense accounts.²⁷³ In sum, all this illustrates the disastrous impact on the daily lives of Congolese and the longer term development of the country of an economic policy that ultimately aimed at little more than ensuring Mobutu's personal power and the enrichment of the leader and his cohorts.²⁷⁴

Furthermore, while American observers in Congo were accurately reporting the darker implications of Mobutu's pilfering of Congo's coffers for his personal enrichment and political entrenchment, once again this sobering analysis was tempered by a much more optimistic overall tenor. When it came to the dangers of Mobutu's policies to Congo's economy, the much less critical American ambassador diluted even the damning IMF assessments described earlier. Despite acknowledging that Dini's twenty-six IMF tours of Congo probably gave him 'better access to information than anyone else outside the top ranks of the Congolese government', Vance concluded his assessment of the IMF report with, 'even granting them substantial validity, Dini's views seem overly pessimistic.'²⁷⁵ He did not elaborate on why he deemed this seemingly in-depth analysis as excessively glum. Retaining a fundamentally more positive stand towards the Kinshasa regime, however, no doubt helped ensure that no efforts were made to pressure Mobutu to reign in some of his more extravagant excesses even as the lot of ordinary Congolese deteriorated.

Indeed, as it became increasingly clear that Mobutu's self-serving economic agenda would do little to satisfy the aspirations of the Congolese population at large, the president sought to mobilise the masses by constructing his particular

²⁷² Junior, Lubumbashi to American Embassy, Kinshasa 'New Economic Measures', 18th December 1973; RG 59, Economic, Box 805, Department of State, NARAII

²⁷³ Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo: from Leopold to Kabila* p. 150

²⁷⁴ Equally critical was the assessment of the French consulate in Lubumbashi. French Consul Yves Bernard, Lubumbashi to Ambassador André Ross, Kinshasa, 'Le Shaba et les récentes mesures économiques', 23 Décembre 1973; Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Kinshasa, Ambassade, Carton 45, CADN

²⁷⁵ Telegram from Ambassador Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Dini on Prospects of Congolese Economy', 2nd July 1970; RG 59, Economic, Box 787, Department of State, NARAII

brand of national identity. No doubt looking to stake his claim as a grand African statesman, his appeal to Zairian 'Authenticity' appeared to borrow from the Senegalese poet-turned-politician Léopold Sédar Senghor's call for greater African cultural awareness in his concept of 'Negritude'.²⁷⁶ The rhetorical vision Mobutu conjured up for Congo, however, was a far cry from a meaningful coherent ideology. In fact, the pronouncements that emerged were an all too transparent effort to distract from the country's more pressing material concerns with a hodgepodge of chauvinistic decrees and populist propaganda. As such, Mobutu's exploration of mass political mobilisation constituted little more than a further aspect of his overall drive to keep Congo's citizens in check while ensuring increasingly unrivalled political dominance and control of the country's revenue for the president and his immediate circle. The implications of this mobilisation effort were twofold. On the one hand, Mobutu's diktats served as a measure of presidential power demonstrating his ability to enforce his whims even in the most personal spheres of his subjects. At the same time, however, it became increasingly apparent that the population at large remained essentially unimpressed by these contrived diversionary tactics.

The 'Authenticity' campaign that began in October 1971 was thus little more than a contrived propaganda effort. As one CIA intelligence report noted, 'Economic deterioration could have a damaging psychological impact that Mobutu seemingly hopes to offset by recourse to chauvinism.'²⁷⁷ Apparently acting out of a 'new respect for Zaire's authentic African heritage', the steps towards 'Authenticity' included renaming Congo as 'Zaire' on October 27th; creating a new flag and national anthem; renaming street, city and geographic features; erasing Belgian monuments and demanding that all Congolese citizens adopt new 'Christian' names.²⁷⁸ Mobutu's fancies even permeated the realm of fashion as he devised a supposedly African style of dress known as the 'Abacost' (A-bas-le-costume) to replace the western suit-and-tie combination.

More than simply a positive effort towards nation building, this jingoistic rhetoric and symbolism was matched with darker xenophobic undertones. Naturally, the former colonists made an obvious target and, despite a reported

²⁷⁶ The French ambassador saw no coincidence that it was during a state visit in Dakar that Mobutu first evoked the return to 'Authenticity' in February of 1971. Ambassadeur Claude Chayet, Kinshasa, 'Rapport de Fin de Mission', 15 Décembre 1972; Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Rapport de Fin de Mission de l'Ambassadeur, Carton 14, CADN

²⁷⁷ Bureau of Intelligence and Research, INR, Intelligence Note, 1st February 1972; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2628, Department of State, NARAII

²⁷⁸ Newlin, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Authenticity and the Radicalization of the Revolution', 14th December 1972; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2628, Department of State, NARAII

warming of relations with Belgium following Prince Albert's state visit in March 1969, at a time of economic downturn Mobutu would sporadically renege on agreements made with Société Générale in the Union Minière mining concession dispute and use the occasion to whip up feelings against the former metropolis, as he did in 1972 and 1974.²⁷⁹ These racial diatribes were not reserved for Belgians alone, as a report on the new mayor of Lubumbashi's campaign to make his city truly Congolese and insure a new 'respect' for the indigenous authorities under the threat of violence indicated.²⁸⁰ Indeed, even other African nationals came under attack as the economic downturn was increasingly blamed on apparent acts of economic 'sabotage' of dissident Congolese as well as foreign irregulars and 'chômeurs'.²⁸¹ Apparently designed to both deflect criticism from the regime's faulty economic program and present further opportunities for shake-downs, it was such xenophobic accusations that resulted in the arbitrary deportation of some three hundred African foreigners in April 1972.²⁸²

Nor was Mobutu's enthusiastic interpretation of Congo's national character confined by geographic borders. Applying his 'Authenticity' rhetoric to the diplomatic sphere, Mobutu sought to rehabilitate his own personal image and that of his country by declaring that, 'by discovering its Authenticity Zaire recovered its soul, and has been freed to choose friends and policies without emotional or ideological hang-ups.'²⁸³ While a longstanding member of the Non-Aligned Movement, an increasingly assertive Mobutu was keen to stress his independence from the western fold with his call for a diplomacy that was 'neither "Right" nor "Left"' as he eyed a place amongst African leaders. This facilitated a thawing of relations with his neighbours and raised Mobutu's stature in Africa as he managed reconciliation with Congo (Brazzaville), Guinea and Algeria; as well as successfully resolving Congo's refugee problems with Sudan and engaging in a flurry of state

²⁷⁹ Deputy Director George C. Denney, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, 'Congo-Kinshasa/Belgian Relations: the Cup Runneth Over', 4th March 1969; Newlin, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Mobutu Moves against SGN Contract', 4th January 1974 both in NSC, Country Files, Africa Box 746, RN; Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Promotion US Exports to Zaire and Belgian/Zairian Relations', 15th September 1972; RG 59, Economic, Box 1116, Department of State, NARAII

²⁸⁰ This campaign included requiring Europeans to wear tie and jacket in the presence of Congolese officials, barring Europeans from smoking in the presences of Congolese officials, closing European private clubs and requiring businessmen to attend MPR functions; all under the threat of violence. Junior, Lubumbashi to Secretary of State, 'New Communal Burgemeester's Outbursts', 29th October 1971; RG 59, Economic, Box 1116, Department of State, NARAII

²⁸¹ Vance, Kinshasa 'Monthly Economic Report', September 1973; RG 59, Economic, Box 805, Department of State, NARAII

²⁸² Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, Washington D.C., 6th April 1972; RG 59, Political & Defence, Box 2842, Department of State, NARAII

²⁸³ Newlin, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, Authenticity and the Radicalization of the Revolution 14th December 1972; RG 59, Political & Defence, Box 2841, Department of State, NARAII

visits around Africa.²⁸⁴ A further aspect of Mobutu's desired recognition as a regional power and independent voice in world affairs, however, was his rapprochement with the communist powers in the early 1970s.

A conversation between Congo's Foreign Minister Nguza Karl-I-Bond and the Polish ambassador in Kinshasa in May 1973 illustrated that Congolese officials openly touted Mobutu's 'Authenticity' rhetoric as evidence of Congo's rediscovered non-aligned orientation.²⁸⁵ Mobutu had longstanding ties with Romania. Long standing ties to Romania were now matched by enthusiastic responses from Hungary and the German Democratic Republic to Congo's open door announcement, with East Germany setting up an embassy in Kinshasa that January and dispatching a delegation to study the potential for strengthening mutual economic ties.²⁸⁶ The Soviet Union too was treated to renewed advances from Mobutu by 1973, although the Congolese leader would remain disappointed by the low level of aid offered from this corner. Most noticeable, however, was Mobutu's rapprochement with the People's Republic of China. In November 1972 Mobutu accorded China full diplomatic recognition and, perhaps following the lead of Nixon and Kissinger in this area, embarked upon a state visit the following January while touring Asia. During this visit Mobutu met with Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou Enlai, reportedly secured a one hundred million USD interest-free loan and returned visibly impressed with the Chinese approach to running their affairs (installing the Salongo forced public works program not long after).²⁸⁷ No doubt these efforts reflected as much Mobutu's need for new sources of income during Congo's growing economic worries as his desire to project his personal image as a grand African statesman.

²⁸⁴ Visits included Uganda in January, Togo in May, Guinea in June, Rwanda, Tanzania and Ethiopia in October 1972. Various telegrams throughout 1972 from US Embassy Kinshasa to Washington D.C.; RG 59, Political & Defence, Box 2841, Department of State, NARAII; Ambassadeur Claude Chayet, Kinshasa, 'Rapport de Fin de Mission'; Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Rapport de Fin de Mission de l'Ambassadeur, Carton 14, CADN

²⁸⁵ 3. Sekretär Hübsch, 'Aufenthalt Rumänischer Parlamentsdelegation in Zaire, Mai 1973, Politisches Archiv, Abteilung Ost und Zentralafrika, Mikrofiche C784/74, MfAA, DDR

²⁸⁶ In 1972 President Nicolae Ceausescu returned the compliment of Mobutu's visit two years earlier with a state visit to Congo. By 1973 ten Romanian professors were teaching in Congo and the departing Romanian ambassador was awarded the 'Order of the Leopard' that September as a mark of the president's affection.

Mobutu's advances were by no means one-sided overtures as the German Democratic Republic had been looking to woo Congo and secure support for its bid to join the UN, WHO and World Bank; all in Arbeits- und Maßnahme-Pläne und Konzeptionen der Abt. Afrika zur Entwicklung der Beziehungen der DDR zu Zaire, Juli 1960- April 1963, Oktober 1970- Dezember 1971, Politisches Archiv, Abteilung Ost und Zentralafrika, Mikrofiche C947/78, MfAA, DDR

²⁸⁷ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'President Mobutu's Account of Far East Trip', 29th January 1973; RG 59, Political & Defence, Box 2841, Department of State, NARAII

Indeed, the Congolese president's diplomatic drive into international politics illustrates three aspects of Mobutu's rule. First of all, as the French ambassador pointed out, the fact that Mobutu indulged in lengthy absences from his domain while touring Africa, Europe (on both sides of the Iron Curtain), Asia and the United States served as a measure of how secure he felt in his power base in Congo by the early 1970s.²⁸⁸ Secondly, this growing self-assurance was at the heart of his desire to attain greater recognition around the globe and Mobutu's efforts in the international arena were a further indication of the Congolese leader's growing hubris at the outset of his second term. Finally, and most importantly, it would be hard to ascribe Mobutu's opening to the communist powers as a genuine ideological reorientation. The dual aims of raising Mobutu's status and diversifying Congo's sources of economic assistance were quite transparent to contemporary observers. Even the newly arrived East German officials and their Soviet counterparts in Kinshasa remained sceptical over the sincerity of Mobutu's reorientation as they pointed to the superficial and largely symbolic nature of the rapprochement and Congo's primary interest in increasing access to economic aid.²⁸⁹ A similar reasoning no doubt permitted American commentators to view these developments with a degree of detachment.

As such, the Nixon administration set itself apart from its predecessors in its apparent willingness to indulge Mobutu's open rapprochement with various communist powers during his 'Authenticity' foray into diplomacy. Such open flirtations with the Eastern Bloc would have thrown all three of the previous administrations in Washington into crisis, bearing in mind that little more than an appeal to Soviet assistance by Patrice Lumumba in 1960 had caused President Eisenhower to infamously label Congo's first premier an 'African Castro' and authorise his planned assassination. By contrast, during the Nixon years both the Kinshasa embassy and the State Department in Washington dismissed this posturing simply as outgrowths of Mobutu's ambitions to advance his personal stature on the world stage, as well as efforts to seek assistance from all available corners of the globe at a time of worsening economic downturn.²⁹⁰ No doubt this

²⁸⁸ Chayet, Kinshasa, 'Rapport de Fin de Mission', 15 Décembre 1972; Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Rapport de Fin de Mission de l'Ambassadeur, Carton 14, CADN

²⁸⁹ Botschafter Weidemann, Kinshasa, 'Über Gespräch mit dem sowjetischen Botschafter Genosse Lawrow, 12.7.73; Aktenvermerke über Gespräche zw. Diplomaten der DDR und Diplomaten Zaires, 1973-1976, Politisches Archiv, Abteilung Ost und Zentralafrika, Mikrofiche C6246, MfAA, DDR

²⁹⁰ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Mobutu's opening to the left', 3rd March 1972; RG 59, Political & Defence, Box 2841, Department of State, NARAI; Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs David Newsom, Briefing Memorandum, 'President Mobutu's Call on President Nixon', 9th October 1973; RG 59, Political & Defence, Box 2842, Department of State, NARAI

merely reflected the changing nature of the Cold War by the 1970s and the fact that this tied in with Nixon's own China policy and efforts towards détente. Ultimately, positioning himself as an assertive African leader perfectly aligned Mobutu with the Nixon-Kissinger strategy of fostering strong regional allies in the global Cold War.²⁹¹

From a Congolese perspective too, certain elements of this chauvinistic campaign seemed to appeal to a genuine popular desire to rid Congo of the sights and symbols of the old colonial order. His corresponding diplomatic initiatives also proved successful in briefly and superficially rehabilitating Congo and Mobutu personally to some extent within the wider African community.²⁹² Beyond these self-serving effects, however, Mobutu's 'Authenticity' campaign failed to capture the popular imagination. With his all too transparent diversion from the material concerns of most Congolese, it became clear that the president was doing little of substance to actually improve their lot and his own image soon began to suffer.

Thus, as early as March 1972, Consul Seitz reported the first dissident grumblings amongst ordinary Congolese from Bukavu that ranged from expressions of concern for Mobutu's health to exasperation over his growing megalomania, 'From many quarters, Mobutu is accused of delusions of grandeur, napoleonism, and ambrosial appetites.'²⁹³ The following year the American consulate in Kisangani recounted a seemingly representative conversation with a local newspaper editor, regional director of the Zairian Press Agency and a former administration official under the title 'The President: Meglomania, Hypocrisy, Lack of Direction', concluding that 'The president's hypocrisy in talking 'Salongo' while stashing away a fortune outside the country, and talking 'authenticity' while sending his children to Belgian Catholic schools, was also criticised by many of these individuals.'²⁹⁴ Ambassador Vance went even further hinting at doubts over the viability of the regime itself that were beginning to emerge in Kinshasa,

'The "authenticity" campaign and Mobutu's travels look to some to be forms of escapism which allow the president to avoid the hard decisions which must be made at a time when the economy has turned sluggish and social problems are

²⁹¹ Indeed, in a strange role-reversal it was Mobutu who initially expressed concern over American overtures to China, which he had always regarded as a troublesome source of aid to rebel factions within Congo. Newsom, Embassy Kinshasa to Secretary of State, Washington D.C., 12th May 1971; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAI; Vance, Kinshasa to Washington D.C., 16th December 1971; RG 59, Political & Defence, Box 2841, Department of State, NARAI

²⁹² Newlin, Kinshasa to Department of State, Washington D.C., 'Authenticity and the Radicalization of the Revolution', 14th December 1972; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2628, Department of State, NARAI

²⁹³ Seitz, Bukavu to Secretary of State, 'Kivu: Mobutu Out of Joint', 13th March, 1972; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2841, Department of State, NARAI

²⁹⁴ Strand, Kisangani to Secretary of State, 'Some Dissident Views of the Mobutu Regime', 26th April 1973; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2842, Department of State, NARAI

mounting. For the first time we have heard knowledgeable Zairians begin to question the long-term survivability of the Mobutu regime.'²⁹⁵

Even these devastating assessments of a growing popular exasperation with Mobutu's rather crass political ploys were refracted through the prism of an altogether more positive appraisal from the Kinshasa embassy, however. As such, Newlin's summary of the cynically concocted 'Authenticity' program at the end of 1972, for example, having accurately described Mobutu's drive for political mastery and the fusion of state and party in his 'radicalisation' agenda, concluded with an overall more optimistic tenor, 'It lends itself well to nation building. Its emotional appeal and its ease of adaption to official policy will make it a useful vehicle for Mobutu for a long time. Moreover, the authenticity campaign is an effort to install pride in the population in its African heritage.'²⁹⁶ Neither Mobutu's Abacost or his exuberant renaming campaign had much to do with African heritage, of course. Again, the tolerance and willingness of his American backers to entertain even Mobutu's more absurd political endeavours was remarkable, especially in view their visible failure to actually penetrate the popular imagination.

Having already awarded himself such titles as 'the Father of the Nation' and 'the Guide', just at the population was beginning to feel the full force of the economic downturn Joseph Désiré Mobutu adopted his own 'authentic' name, 'Mobutu Sese Seko Nkuku Ngbenda Wa Za Banga' or 'the all powerful warrior who, because of his inflexible will to win, goes from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake.' While a further expression of his growing hubris, this renaming campaign was not coincidental. Forcing all Congolese to change their 'European' Christian names into 'authentic' Congolese names was a demonstration of the regime's ability to impose its will even in the most private aspects of ordinary people. Thus, even as his personal popularity waned under the social and economic strains endured by the population at large, the authority of the regime was reinforced with an increasingly repressive state apparatus. The final but devastating aspect of Mobutu's increasingly assertive regime, then, was its repressive capabilities through its pervasive military, police and Sûreté services combined with a ruthless rejection of all dissenting voices from any corner of Congo. The most obvious manifestation of Mobutu's growing authoritarianism can be found in his clashes with the Catholic Church and the student movement, two independent voices that

²⁹⁵ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'The Last 4 Months: Change as the Only Constant', 3rd February 1972; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2841, Department of State, NARAII

²⁹⁶ Newlin, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Authenticity and the Radicalization of the Revolution', 14th December 1972; RG 59, Political & Defence, Box 2841, Department of State, NARAII

had largely remained beyond the immediate influence of the state during Mobutu's first term.

The Catholic Church was national organisation comparable to the state in its penetration of the population but more effective in supplying social services. By 1974, for example, Catholic schools enrolled 61.7 per cent of Congo's primary pupils and 42.1 per cent of its secondary students (compared to 13.8 per cent and 35.4 per cent in state schools respectively).²⁹⁷ Unsurprisingly, the church, and Cardinal Joseph Albert Malula in particular (the Archbishop of Kinshasa since 1964), was outspokenly critical of the 'Authenticity' campaign to rid Congolese of their Christian names, as well as the more general drive of the MPR to infiltrate all facets of daily life in Congo. Despite the best efforts of Congo's bishops to reason and reach a compromise with their president, following his critical stance Malula was forced into exile while Catholic seminaries were simply absorbed by the JMPR (the youth movement of the sole political party) under the threat of mandatory closure. On the one hand, this was a clear indication of state power and the inability of even an old established institution to resist its will. More than this, however, the clash with the church was a further measure of Mobutu's apparent disregard for popular opinion. As Consul Seitz pointed out from Bukavu, 'A President reshuffling his cabinet, negotiating a World Bank loan, or touring Japan has little effect on Kivuities, but when the church shudders, the people feel it... The people are now fed up with all the ballyhoo and bunting from Kinshasa.'²⁹⁸ Regardless of this exasperation, however, Mobutu had decisively demonstrated the extent of his reach, his willingness to use it and, in so doing, eliminated one of the few remaining independent voices in Congo.

By contrast, the student demonstrations that occurred for the first time in 1969 appeared to be less directed against specific government policies than borne out of material grievances over student living conditions and the education system in general.²⁹⁹ The West German embassy, for example, reported that ninety-five per cent of Lovanium University students in Kinshasa were dependent on government grants of only some seven Zaires (ca. fourteen dollars) per month despite Congo's ever rising living costs.³⁰⁰ The protests that erupted in June 1969 at the university

²⁹⁷ Young and Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State* p. 67

⁶¹ Seitz, Bukavu to Secretary of State, 'Mobutu Out of Joint', 13th March, 1972; RG 59, Political & Defence, Box 2841, Department of State, NARAII

²⁹⁹ Memorandum from Executive Secretary Theodor L. Elliot Jr. to Kissinger, 'Student Disturbances at Lovanium, Congo', 8th June 1971; RG 59, Political & Defence, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAII

³⁰⁰ Prashke, Kinshasa, to Bonn, 6th June 1969, 'Blutige Studentenunruhen in Kinshasa'; Band 815, Innenpolitische Berichte von Kongo, Kinshasa, , B34, BRD

when close to a thousand students took to the streets were met with a heavy-handed ANC response that left twelve students dead and some thirty subsequently imprisoned for up to twenty years.³⁰¹ As the anniversary of the '4th June Martyrs' approached in the following years, protests pitting the students against the government erupted again on university campuses in 1970 and 1971. This was compounded by student groups apparently mocking the elaborate national mourning following the death of Mobutu's mother in 1971.³⁰² No doubt stung by this very public personal attack and as ever intolerant of any openly dissident group, Mobutu responded by closing Lovanium University in Kinshasa and forcefully conscripting all its students into the army for two years, whether they were actively involved in the demonstrations or not.

While these draconian measures were accompanied by the usual claims that outside influence and threats to the government were behind the disturbances, it was plain for all to see that this was a vendetta against a group that had challenged Mobutu personally.³⁰³ Unlike its wrangling with the church, however, this government crackdown did not evoke widespread popular sympathy for a group viewed by many as a privileged and pampered elite. While some of the sentences were partially commuted, this was a further cynical demonstration of government power at a time of economic downturn and increasing grumblings against the regime.³⁰⁴ Thus Deputy Chief of Mission King reported, 'In the political atmosphere of the Congo at this time the government could not afford to allow a high profile sector of society to get away with a challenge to the President's authority'³⁰⁵ and it was this sentiment that ensured Mobutu felt, 'compelled to react strongly and avoid any impression of hesitancy or weakness.'³⁰⁶ In other words, within a few years of the resumption of Mobutu's second term it was clear, not least to American observers, that a regime was now in place that would not tolerate dissent, whether motivated by political disagreements or simple material concerns. More to the point, alongside a miscellany of populist rhetoric lay the threat of physical violence to ensure conformity when this was deemed necessary.

³⁰¹ Prashke, Kinshasa, to Bonn, 18th September 1969; Band 815, Innenpolitische Berichte von Kongo, Kinshasa, B34, BRD

³⁰² Deputy Chief of Mission King, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, Washington D.C., 5th June 1971; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAI

³⁰³ Intelligence Note, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, 'Congo, Kinshasa: Students- Mobutu socks it to them again', 11th June 1971; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAI

³⁰⁴ Prashke, Kinshasa to Bonn, 'Politik und Klima im Kongo', 9 August 1971; Band 815, Innenpolitische Berichte von Kongo, Kinshasa, , B34, BRD

³⁰⁵ King, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Lovanium Student Disorders', June 17th 1971; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAI

³⁰⁶ King, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Student Disturbances at Lovanium University', June 8th 1971; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAI

Even these unpalatable coercive measures were cast in relatively favourable or at least apologetic terms on the pages of American official reports, as the above citations indicate. The American embassy in Kinshasa justified Mobutu's draconian response to the student disturbances along similar lines, in terms of the political realities in Congo making it 'necessary for the leadership to reassert itself from time to time, even at the risks of opening new channels of political vulnerability and of harming friends and innocents.'³⁰⁷ In this way, the silencing of dissenting voices and complete eradication of any form of political plurality could be rationalised as a necessary sacrifice to stability and order as, 'In sum, the amorphous Congolese society is still too vulnerable to permit any group, even university students, the luxury of its own parochial path.'³⁰⁸ Again, relief at Mobutu's ability to install a semblance of order, and perhaps a willingness to attribute his less palatable tendencies to a supposed Congolese backwardness, conspired in an overall uncritical stance towards the Kinshasa despot.

The purpose of the above dissection of Congolese domestic politics has been to illustrate the swift progression of Mobutu's government into a fully-fledged authoritarian regime at the beginning of the 1970s. In a relatively short period, Mobutu had misspent much of his personal political capital earned by the end of his first term in office and ensured that any fragile hope that was emerging for Congo's future had once more been replaced with a depressing resignation to the hardships of daily life. Centred very much on the persona of the president himself, a regime had emerged bent on absolute political control and an economic system of largess that benefited only the few fortunate enough to be in the good grace of the uncontested despot. This regime was built on three basic tenets of crass populist political manipulations such as the 'Authenticity' campaign, a systemic top-down corruption encapsulated in the ruinous 'Zairianisation' program and the naked threat of aggression as felt by the student movement between 1969-71. Unfortunately, despite much huffing and puffing from Kinshasa, none of the devised policies had much to do with a coherent strategy towards bettering the lives of ordinary Congolese. With the excuse of the emergency measures and a necessary period of consolidation following years of rebellion and upheaval fading, the self-serving nature of the Mobutu regime was becoming painfully obvious to contemporary observers from within and beyond Congo's border.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ King, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Lovanium Student Disorders', June 17th 1971; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAII

Indeed, the true hallmarks of the Mobutu regime all found ample expression on the pages of American official reports. While apparently relatively well informed, it is remarkable, however, how time and again this accurate reporting was coloured by a much more sympathetic reading of the policies of the Congolese government and the actions of Mobutu personally. No doubt this was in part due to the relief felt at having a seemingly workable partnership with a Kinshasa government able to maintain a degree of order and stability in Congo for the first time since the turbulent 1960s. Once again, an element of racial prejudice also appears to have contributed to a willingness to dismiss the more unpalatable aspects of the Kinshasa regime as simply inherent to a backward part of the world in need of strong central guidance and manipulation, as if little more could be expected from Congo. Perhaps the increasingly close rapport between Ambassador Vance personally and President Mobutu also contributed to a certain myopia that stood in the way of a more critical overall view of developments in Congo.³⁰⁹ Ultimately, while all these factors no doubt contributed to the American indulgence of Mobutu Sese Seko, it was his ability to fit perfectly into the Nixon-Kissinger Cold War strategy in the Third World that lay at the heart of his success in securing on going and unconditional American support.

Mobutu had begun the early 1970s by promoting symbols of modernity in Congo, from his nationalist rhetoric the grand industrial projects of which the Inga Dam was the most glaring manifestation. Scratching beneath the surface, however, reveals a state geared towards the exploitation of ordinary Congolese by a narrow elite syphoning off the profits of the country's resources akin to the most rapacious colonial rule. The extent to which the Nixon administration proved a willing and encouraging ally throughout these developments, and how far the White House executive directed this, forms the subject of the second half of this chapter.

³⁰⁹ Mobutu even mentioned his close ties to Sheldon Vance in his second encounter with Nixon in October 1973. Kissinger, 'Memcon: Meeting with President Mobutu Sese Seko', October 10th 1973; FRUS Volume E-6

The Nixon Approach Towards Congo: Presidential Endorsements and the Business Interest

That the Nixon administration was not averse to dealing with right wing dictators was amply demonstrated by its much-cited encouragement of General Augusto Pinochet's coup and the overthrow of Salvador Allende Gossens in Chile in September 1973. Indeed, in his analysis of Nixon's Latin America policies, Mark Attwood Lawrence eloquently encapsulates how the Nixon-Kissinger vision of foreign policy had little interest in the global 'South' beyond preserving stability and avoiding blows to American prestige. Kissinger himself reportedly told the Chilean Foreign Minister in 1969, 'Nothing of importance can come from the South. History has never been produced in the South. The axis of history starts in Moscow, goes to Bonn, crosses over to Washington and finishes in Tokyo.'³¹⁰ To leave Washington free to pursue its grand strategies towards the Soviet Union and China and focus on areas deemed strategically more significant such as Europe and the Middle East (and in line with his 'Vietnamisation' of the war in South East Asia), the president's 'Nixon Doctrine' thus sought to bolster friendly local regimes to shoulder more of the burden of containing communist advances while Washington pursued its diplomacy of détente. The Congolese leader for his part appeared to offer exactly what the 'Nixon Doctrine' sought in a Third World ally and Mobutu was more than willing to portray himself as a staunch regional voice who could, with American support, stand tall against communist subversion in Africa. While not particularly revolutionary when compared to the Johnson approach to Congo during the 1960s, these extremely limited aims in the Third World and the concomitant disregard for the internal machinations of friendly allies coincided with the growing domestic transgression of an increasingly assertive Mobutu.

The previous section illustrated how essentially accurate readings of events in Congo were coloured by an altogether sanguine and positive appraisal of the Mobutu regime by the American country team. Rather than simply reflecting the failings of an uncritical embassy staff, however, an exploration of the policies pursued by the Washington executive towards Congo suggests that this was very much in line with the Nixon-Kissinger vision for the 'South'. On the one hand, the Military Assistance Program and economic aid of the Johnson administration continued uninterrupted. In addition, however, three key innovations also emerged

³¹⁰ Quoted by Mark Attwood Lawrence, *History from Below: the United States and Latin America in the Nixon Years* in Frederick Logevall and Andrew Preston (eds.), *Nixon and the World; American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (Oxford Uni. Press, 2008) p. 269

with the arrival of the foreign policy expertise of the Nixon-Kissinger team in the White House. First of all, after the incessant meddling in Congolese internal politics during the 1960s, the Nixon administration very much proclaimed a policy of non-intervention in the internal workings of the Congolese state. Far from reflecting any deeper scruples over infringing the sovereignty of its African partner, this merely illustrated the extent to which the United States under Nixon viewed Mobutu as a worthy ally who should not be unnecessarily riled over seemingly minor transgressions in his domestic affairs. Secondly, while Johnson was keen to keep Congolese matters very much at arms length, Nixon, by contrast, embraced his Congolese counterpart with an unfettered presidential endorsement in the form of two personal meetings with Mobutu Sese Seko. Finally, and as a direct extension of this presidential backing, this period saw an emerging American business interest in Congo. It was not private business that shaped American official policy, however, as a closer examination reveals that during the early 1970s it was very much the politicians who courted American businesses to pique their interest in Congo and attract investments in the hope of strengthening its African ally. All of this suggests that it was the Nixon-Kissinger White House that was the central driving force in defining the American line towards Congo during this formative period.

Before delving deeper into the actual policies pursued towards Congo, it is worth noting one area entirely ignored by the Nixon administration. At no point was any effort made to influence the Congolese leader on the internal political developments within the country, no matter how obvious their detrimental impact on the population at large became. That this was part of a conscious strategy of non-intervention is borne out by two particular incidents during which actors both from within Congo and from beyond its borders actively sought American assistance in reigning in Congo's president. First of all, following the student repressions of 1971 the local Katangan leadership under the Mwant Yav (a Lunda title), David Tshombe, wrote a letter appealing for help to the local US consulate in Lubumbashi as the measures taken against students were both opposed to the interests of the country and contrary to Mobutu's own stated 'Development '80 Goals'. Having described the negative impact of these measures himself, American Consul Linton scoffed at the suggestion of a US intervention and concluded his report of the letter with the rather disparaging assessment that, 'This approach of the Lunda Emperor to a foreign government suggesting intervention in domestic affairs illustrates the remoteness of the Lundas from the government in Kinshasa in 1971... It shows also

that old Tshombists never die and never cease hoping.’³¹¹ Similarly, an appeal from the Vatican for the US government to intervene on behalf of Cardinal Malula’s plight during Mobutu’s clash with the Catholic Church was flatly rejected as impractical and without hope of success by both the US Kinshasa embassy and the State Department in Washington.

The non-interventionism espoused by American officials in the above two examples is a little disingenuous, of course, when the American hand in Mobutu’s rise and the extent to which his regime continued to rely on US backing is considered. That on going military assistance was strengthening the power of the state, as much against internal dissent as against any potential foreign aggressor, was also abundantly clear. Again, the reports from the American consulate in Lubumbashi, for example, illustrate how the Kinshasa government responded to popular discontent against economic hardship and ANC brutality by dispatching its air force and Consul Leonardo Neher noted, ‘Their mission was reconnaissance and an exhibition of government power... T28s were used against the rebels in 1964, and are still feared in the area.’³¹² The United States was thus still providing much of the firepower underpinning Mobutu’s rule. To the Nixon administration, however, this leverage never translated into a perceived need to prod Kinshasa towards a more sustainable and effective form of government. In fact, the signals from Washington were quite the opposite.

On the 4th August 1970 President Nixon welcomed his Congolese counterpart on the lawns of the White House with all the trappings of a state visit and an enthusiastic endorsement as he proclaimed, ‘You have moved forward economically, you have established unity in your country, and you have a vitality, which impresses every visitor when he comes to the Congo.’³¹³ This was the beginning of Mobutu’s ten-day tour of the East and West coasts of the United States designed to garner further support from the American government and woo investments from private businesses into Congo. It also marked the most public association of any American president with the Congolese leader up to that point, and the private meeting that followed between Nixon, Kissinger and Mobutu in the White House merits closer examination.

³¹¹ Linton, Lubumbashi to Secretary of State, Washington D.C., ‘Letter from Mwant Yav’, 22nd June 1971; King, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, ‘Lovanium Student Disorders’, June 17th 1971; both in RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAI

³¹² Neher, Lubumbashi to Secretary of State, ‘Internal Security; North Katanga’, 30th September 1970; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAI

³¹³ Nixon’s welcome address to Mobutu on the lawn of the White House, 4th August 1970. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/>

Immediately apparent from the record of this meeting was the extent to which the Cold War prism dominated proceedings, as well as Mobutu's ability to control the direction of this encounter by steering conversation away from issues of development and stressing the continuation of a supposed 'CHICOM' threat to Africa. That this emphasis on Congo's security needs held particular appeal to the Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy prism was highlighted by the American president's response, 'Many in Congress and the government would say that the Congo needed to emphasise development, build schools etc., but President Nixon understood that there was not sense in cultivating something that could be snatched away from you.'³¹⁴ As such, Mobutu played the role of the stoic military leader as a bulwark against communism in Africa with aplomb and Nixon responded with further assurances for military aid, agreeing to sell Congo another three C-130 military transport airplanes and a navy patrol boat package while waiving some 350,000 USD fees and a US Navy training and maintenance program as gestures of goodwill.³¹⁵ This was particularly noteworthy as the arms sale was agreed only shortly after Lamberto Dini and the IMF had specifically fingered the growing balance of payment issues and the gross misallocation of capital as a grave danger to the development of the Congolese economy, illustrating Washington's continued willingness to subvert economic matters to Mobutu's perceived security needs.

Indeed, the economic development of Congo was apparently to be left entirely to the private sector. As such, the second notable feature of this presidential encounter was the willingness of the White House to assist Mobutu's efforts to encourage American businesses to invest in Congo during his subsequent tour of the States. In this way, Nixon offered advice on how best to entice the business community in New York and noted that he himself had been encouraging investment in Congo since 1967.³¹⁶ Nor was this mere rhetoric as the American president had publically prodded the US business community already during Mobutu's welcome on the lawn of the White House, as he addressed them directly with,

'My advice to them (the business leaders) very simply would be this: The Congo is a good investment not only because of its natural wealth but because of a

³¹⁴ NSC Staffer Marshall D. Wright, Memorandum: 'President's meeting with Mobutu on 4th August 1970', 13th August 1970; NSC, Country Files, Africa, Box 746, RN

³¹⁵ Wright, Memorandum for Kissinger, 5th August 1970; NSC, Country Files, Africa, Box 746, RN

³¹⁶ Wright, Memorandum: 'President's meeting with Mobutu on 4th August 1970', 13th August 1970; NSC, Country Files, Africa, Box 746, RN

wealth even more important than its natural resources, a strong and vigorous and progressive people, and a stable leadership.’³¹⁷

No strings were attached to either the agreed military assistance package or this encouragement of the private sector, however, and the final feature of this meeting was the remarkable absence of any pressure for reform, or indeed mention, of the less palatable aspects of Mobutu’s corrupt regime. Quite the opposite was true, in fact, as both Nixon and Kissinger treated Congo’s leader with sycophantic praise and, in a clear effort to appeal to his vanity, a secret back channel of communication was set up between President Mobutu and the White House’s much vaunted National Security Adviser.³¹⁸

Mobutu’s visit some three years later while attending the United Nations General Assembly was remarkably similar in tenor; despite the collapse of Congo’s economy in the meantime, Mobutu’s growing assertiveness in the international arena and the increasingly brazen domestic transgressions of the Kinshasa regime. Once again, both in his private meeting with Kissinger in New York on the 5th October 1973 and during his official visit with Nixon five days later, the American president and his newly appointed Secretary of State flattered and kowtowed to the Congolese leader’s vanity. Indeed, the most notable feature of his renewed encounters was the muted reaction from his American counterparts over Mobutu’s posturing at the United Nations.

Declaring that, ‘between a brother and a friend the choice is clear,’ Congo’s president had ruptured relations with Israel to align himself with African and Arab voices at the General Assembly.³¹⁹ At the same time, Mobutu was quick to offer a reassuring titbit in his meeting with Kissinger the following day to illustrate that he was not erring far from the American fold. With the United States under pressure at the UN over its Cambodia policies, Mobutu postulated on his particular brand of Non-Alignment,

‘You can count on your friends. When there are problems there is always a way of taking care of them... I had dinner last night with an old friend in the US government. We talked about Cambodia. He said that Zaire has its political problems, and the US has its problems. He explained that a Zaire vote to seat Prince Sihanouk at the General Assembly would make additional problems for

³¹⁷ John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/>

³¹⁸ Interestingly the Memorandum of this conversation passed to Secretary of State Rogers struck this detail from the record apparently keeping the State Department in the dark about this direct line of communication.

³¹⁹ Crawford Young and Thomas Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State* p. 138

President Nixon. He asked us to abstain on the vote even though we recognise Sihanouk at Algeria. We agreed to abstain. This is our method of collaborating with friends.’³²⁰

Brazenly manipulative, Mobutu’s quite transparent manoeuvres nevertheless impressed his American counterparts and contributed to the entirely uncritical stance adopted by Kissinger and Nixon.

Indeed, Kissinger did little more than voice his gratitude for Congo’s continued collaboration and in the presidential meeting five days later he went even further in praise of Mobutu’s performance, ‘Mr. President, your speech at the United Nations was a masterpiece. It sounded critical of the United States but, when one read it, it was not so bad.’³²¹ To be sure, further military assistance packages were not agreed during this meeting and Mobutu’s concerns over the PL-480 wheat sales agreements and the effect of US mineral stockpile sales on world copper and cobalt prices remained unresolved. This was probably more a reflection of America’s own economic dilemmas during the global downturn and the by now lame-duck White House’s inability to deepen its commitments to Congo in the midst of the Watergate crisis, however, rather than any more profound shift in priorities. No doubt to illustrate that this did no mark any cooling of relations, Kissinger acquiesced to granting Mobutu’s ambassador in Washington special access to his personal assistant. Nixon chimed in that this was a privilege reserved only for the closest friends, a status apparently not yet achieved by any other African head of state. In other words, Mobutu’s manipulative ability was complimented by the White House’s reluctance to risk any confrontation with its Congolese ally. Neither his domestic misdemeanours nor his diplomatic grandstanding thus evoked even a critical mention throughout these talks.

The significance of the Nixon White House’s very public and unwavering presidential endorsement of the Mobutu regime was twofold. First of all, Mobutu’s hobnobbing with Washington’s finest and the captains of American industry during his first tour of the United States no doubt served to raise his prestige at home as he basked in Nixon’s superpower embrace. Indeed, the American embassy noted precisely this impact upon Mobutu’s return to Kinshasa, ‘From the Kinshasa optic the president’s accomplishments were impressive indeed... and of course enhanced

³²⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, Participants: President Mobutu Sese Seko, Presidential Counselor Mkolo, Ambassador Lombo, Secretary of State Kissinger, Assistant Secretary of State David Newsom, NSC Member Harold Horan, ‘US-Zaire Relations’, Waldorf Towers Suite 10 R, 5th October 1973; NSC, Country Files, Africa, Box 746, RN

³²¹ Kissinger, ‘Memcon: Meeting with President Mobutu Sese Seko’, October 10th 1973; FRUS, Volume E-6

his stature as statesman and leader.’³²² The first presidential visit coming shortly before Congo’s national elections, there can be little doubt that the Nixon-Kissinger team openly sought to bolster the domestic credentials of their man in Kinshasa. Secondly, from the outset it was Mobutu’s ability to fit precisely into the Nixon strategy of looking to regional leaders in the global fight against communism that ensured him unqualified support and an uncritical ally even as his domestic situation soured. In other words, during the Nixon years it was very much the Washington executive that defined the American approach towards Congo. Indeed, the political leadership in both countries was even the driving force behind the effort to attract American private business investment to Congo. This latter point is particularly important, not least because of the role attributed to the private sector in shaping the American government’s Congo agenda in the existing literature, and merits further discussion.

With internal conflict receding and a measure of political stability established under President Mobutu, by 1970 Congo was increasingly depicted as an attractive investment opportunity by both the White House and the American country team. Thus Vance noted in November 1970,

‘Congo, after a shaky beginning as a nation, is now entering a period when economic and social progress can be achieved within the framework of political stability and strong national leadership. The business community of course has duly noted these important elements in the Congo situation which prop up the courage of the timid and add bristles to the bears.’³²³

Indeed, the embassy began to play an integral role in looking to assist the establishment of American business ties to Congo and much of the cable traffic between Kinshasa and Washington can be summarised as progress reports on the various trade missions and study groups from diverse companies ranging from Ford, General Motors, Firestone, Goodyear, First National City Bank of New York, Price Waterhouse Coopers, Gulf Oil, Pan Am, and McDonnell Douglas. Furthermore, American firms also began to make inroads into Congo’s mining sector. In particular, a consortium headed by Standard Oil of Indiana (the Société Minière du Tenke Fungurume consisting of Charter Consolidated, Mitsui, BRGM- a French government research and engineering group- and Leon Templesman & Sons) was awarded the copper-rich Tenke-Fungurume copper and cobalt mining concession.

³²² King, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, ‘Monthly Economic Review’, 7th September 1970; RG 59, Economic, Box 788, Department of State, NARAII

³²³ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, ‘Monthly Economic Review’, 19th November 1970; RG 59, Economic, Box 788, Department of State, NARAII

Crawford Young points out that exploratory ventures by Texaco and Exxon Oil, Union Carbide and Bethlehem steel, as well as the propensity to equate bank loans and contracted services with actual investment into Congo, fuelled a slightly inflated picture of the extent of American private investment. Indeed, even the vaunted the Tenke-Fungurume concession never came into production throughout the period under consideration as the projected 250 million dollar (USD) investment was mothballed by 1976 due to the downturn in copper prices.³²⁴

Nevertheless, by May 1973, Vance estimated that private US investment in Congo had reached close to 160 million dollars from a mere thirty million dollars in 1970.³²⁵ That the American private sector now had a growing interest in Congo is also borne out by a memorandum prepared for President Nixon in advance of his October presidential meeting advising that, 'Our objectives are to maintain Mobutu's favourable attitude towards the US private sector and to reinforce his inclination to support our policy objectives.'³²⁶ Similarly, the 'Zairianisation' decrees in 1973 provoked considerable concern from Washington and a memorandum for the Assistant National Security Adviser, General Brent Scowcroft, noted with relief that American businesses remained unaffected.³²⁷ In other words, throughout the Nixon presidency American business interests established themselves in Congo and became a factor in the US government approach towards the country. Moreover, while perhaps not centrally coordinated, this was very much part of a US government effort to assist the continued development of Congo's economy while tying it further to its American ally. As such, both the president and the embassy played a role in facilitating this emerging business relationship. It is significant, for example, that while companies such as Good Year and Ford had sent delegations in early 1970, actual deals were only struck following Mobutu's return from the official state visit to Washington and the very public White House endorsement entailed therein.³²⁸

At first glance, then, it would seem logical to assume that this growing role of private American enterprise also began to influence policy makers in Washington.

³²⁴ M. Crawford Young, 'The Zairian Crisis and American Foreign Policy' in Gerald J. Bender, James S. Coleman, Richard L. Sklar (eds.), *African Crisis Areas and US Foreign Policy* (University of California, Berkeley; London and Los Angeles, 1985) pp. 215-216

³²⁵ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, Semi Annual Report: 'Economic Trends in the Zaire and their Implications for the US', 10th May 1973; RG 59, Economic, Box 805, Department of State, NARAII

³²⁶ Newsom, Briefing Memorandum: 'President Mobutu's call on President Nixon', 9th October 1973; RG 59, Political & Defence, Box 2842, Department of State, NARAII

³²⁷ Thomas R. Pickering (Executive Secretary to the White House), Memorandum for Major General Brent Scowcroft, the White House, 'Mobutu's November 30th Nationalization Decrees', 11th December 1973; NSC, Country Files, Africa, Box 746, RN

³²⁸ Monthly Economic Reviews compiled by the American Embassy in Kinshasa; RG 59, Economic, Boxes 787, 788, 805 and 1116, Department of State, NARAII

The strongest proponent of this line of reasoning is David Gibbs and his 'Business Conflict Model', asserting through a somewhat theoretical approach that it was private business groups that very much shaped US policy towards Congo from the early 1960s and during the Nixon administration in particular. Through this prism, the United States relied upon its partnership with Mobutu to further the ends of various private business groups and would not endanger this relationship for fear of losing its advantage. As such, Gibbs sees the Mobutu coup, the quelling of the mercenary rebellion of 1967 and the subsequent arms support and presidential meetings during the Nixon years as a single thread of government policy to displace the Belgian Union Minière de Haut Katanga with American companies (most notably the Templesman mining group). As evidence he cites the awarding of the Tenke concession to the Templesman-led consortium in favour of Belgian competitors in September 1970, shortly after Mobutu's visit to Washington and the resulting arms deals. In this way, Gibbs states, 'The United States, it is argued, sought to reduce influence of Union Minière in the Congo in order to open investment opportunities for American business.'³²⁹ Upon closer inspection, however, this teleological argument appears a simplistic misreading of events as they transpired.

Contradicting this narrow interpretation of government policy driven by the rivalries of the business community was the on going cooperation between the United States and Belgium, both in the governmental and private spheres. Thus, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs David Newsom was keen to emphasise to Viscount Davignon (attaché to the Belgian Foreign Minister since the post independence days of Paul Henri Spaak) that the United States was entirely ambivalent over the awarding of the Tenke mining concession stating that, 'since Union Minière's group has American participation, we had no reason to favour either side.'³³⁰ Joint private commercial ventures of this kind also continued in other spheres as Gulf Oil partnered with the Belgian firm 'Solico' to erect a drilling rig to explore potential oil reserves off the narrow Congolese coast and an American-Belgian consortium was awarded the Inga II dam project in 1972.³³¹ In

³²⁹ David N. Gibbs, *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention* p. 185

³³⁰ Newsom to Secretary of State, 'Storm Clouds over Congo (K)- Belgian Relations', 6th October 1970; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAII; According to Crawford Young, the American stake even in the Tenke consortium was only thirty per cent. M. Crawford Young, *The Zairian Crisis and American Foreign Policy* in Bender, Coleman, Sklar (eds.), *African Crisis Areas and US Foreign Policy* pp. 215-216

³³¹ Vance, Kinshasa, 'Monthly Economic Review', 19th November 1970; RG 59, Economic, Box 788, Department of State, NARAII; Vance, American Embassy Kinshasa, 'Monthly Economic Review', 15th November 1972; RG 59, Economic, Box 805, Department of State, NARAII

the diplomatic sphere too, cooperation continued despite an evident Belgian wariness of US intentions. Newsom met with Viscount Davignon while touring Congo in 1970 and Ambassador Vance met twice with Count Jean D'Ursel (the Belgian Foreign Ministry's Director for African Affairs) in an obvious effort to uphold bilateral consultations over Congo. Ultimately, throughout all this the various American officials were at pains to stress that the overall aim of a stable and peaceful Congo was dependent on the continued Belgian primacy in Congo's economy, as Newsom surmised, 'Our objectives in the Congo, of course, are predicated on the continuation of Belgium's role as the major supplier of technical assistance for the government, and managerial expertise for the private sector.'³³²

As a result, an obvious flaw appears in Gibbs's reading of the evidence at hand. Simply pointing to the apparent business ties of various administration officials does not sufficiently explain how this served to shape government policy in Washington. Indeed, this approach mistakes cause for effect. The desire of the US government to encourage the business community stemmed from a larger aim of supporting the Kinshasa government. This, in turn, relied upon a degree of cooperation with the Belgian government and a more nuanced relationship than Gibbs's simplistic theoretical reading can account for. Throughout all this, the fostering of a stable, strong and pro-American African ally in the perceived Cold War struggle on the continent was the fundamental goal of US strategy. At no point did the business interests replace or subvert this agenda. As such, while business played an increasing role in Congo, the administration's failure to take more seriously Mobutu's administrative shortcomings cannot be explained in such reductionist terms. Furthermore, the impression given by a close reading of the State Department records is that the business community was very much harnessed by the government rather than the other way round.

Rather than private businesses pushing policy makers, it was policy makers themselves who actively sought to promote Congo as a viable investment to influence private businesses. For the Nixon administration, this was simply part of humouring Mobutu and the next phase of strengthening their pivotal African ally. Particularly revealing in this regard is a memorandum for the Secretary of State entitled 'Mobutu's Interest in Private Investment' deliberating on precisely this government-led effort to attract US businesses already in March 1970 as follows, 'the next step is to identify new investment opportunities in Congo and to publicise

³³² Newsom to Secretary of State, 'Storm Clouds over Congo (K)- Belgian Relations'; 6th October 1970; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAII

these opportunities (as well as the favourable investment climate) among potential investors.’³³³ While it was the respective governments in Washington and Kinshasa that actively sought to harness the business community to their own wider political aims, the implicit assumption that the arrival of private enterprise would naturally foster development was deeply flawed.

In fact, this governmental guidance of private sector investment into Congo brought with it an unintended side effect with sinister implications. In his ‘*Les Safaris Technologiques au Zaïre, 1970-80*’, Benoit Verhaegan eloquently illustrates how government guaranteed financing and private businesses combined to deliver any number of goods and services to Congo that had little to do with actual local demands or necessities of the country’s development as has been seen.³³⁴ Instead, grossly wasteful prestige projects, and the corresponding rents from awarding contracts, fed both the ambrosial appetites and the delusions of grandeur of the Kinshasa dictator. Rather than having to search out sustainable business opportunities for themselves, private corporations could deal with the president directly to secure large orders for their products and services with relatively little risk to all except for the long-term economic viability of Congo.

A glaring example of such a project was the second phase of the Inga Dam construction announced in 1973 and completed by 1977 at a cost of some 260 million dollars (twice that of the initial phase of the project) and without a market for the additional seven hundred megawatts now available.³³⁵ Ambassador Vance, however, boasted that the awarding of the construction of this project to a consortium consisting of Belgian (ACEC- wholly owned by Westinghouse), American (Westinghouse Electric) and Austrian (Voest) firms had been made possible by the favourable terms of financing offered by the Export-Import Bank of the United States.³³⁶ Similarly, the construction of the Inga-Shaba power line was awarded largely to American firms (Morrison-Knudsen and Fishback & Moore) despite both the World Bank and the Belgian government having declared no interest in financing such projects, ‘based more on political than economic considerations’.³³⁷ As such, Mobutu accumulated a burden of national debt

³³³ Information from Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, C. Robert Moore to Secretary of State, ‘Mobutu’s interest in Private Investments’, 3rd March 1970; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2627, Department of State, NARAII

³³⁴ Benoit Verhaegan, ‘*Les Safaris Technologiques au Zaïre, 1970-80*’ *Politique Africaine* (June, 1985)

³³⁵ Crawford Young and Thomas Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State* pp. 296-301

³³⁶ Vance, Kinshasa, ‘Monthly Economic Review’, 28th December 1973; RG 59, Economic, Box 805, Department of State, NARAII

³³⁷ American Ambassador Growley reported the Belgian view from Brussels to Vance, Kinshasa, 1st September 1972; RG 59, Political & Defence, Box 2842, Department of State, NARAII

(estimated at 2.6 billion USD between 1973-5 alone) with very little value added to the country's economy or infrastructure to show for it, all the while syphoning off huge rents from these investments to line his own pockets.³³⁸ When viewed in the light of the increasingly blatant corruption of the Mobutist state then, the Nixon administration's encouragement for the American private sector to deal with Mobutu directly as a portal to Congo's investment opportunities (while offering government guaranteed financing at the same time) appears decidedly questionable, further exacerbating the emergence of the 'kleptocratic' state and securing the regime's grip on the economy.³³⁹

In sum, it was in the early years of the 1970s that Mobutu Sese Seko successfully transformed Congo into his peculiar version of a totalitarian state. Civil society and social ties were gradually eroded as much by the threat of government repression as by the all-pervasive corruption that was fast becoming the only means of advancement in an economic system dominated by the patronage of a narrow political elite. The first part of this chapter explored the internal dynamics of the Mobutist state; from the subverted electoral process, his foray into mass politics with the 'Authenticity' campaign, his increasingly fraudulent exploitation of Congo's economy epitomised in the 'Zairianisation' program, and the evermore invasive nature of state security apparatus permeating all corners of daily life in Congo. Moreover, well aware of its ally's growing transgressions, this process was all the while backstopped by the support of an uncritical and indulgent Nixon administration.

The second section of this chapter thus illustrated that the White House took the lead in defining this accepting stance towards the Mobutu regime. At the heart of this approach lay the twin pillars of the 'Nixon Doctrine' and the administration's willingness to look to private businesses to bolster its Congolese ally. Mobutu's ability to fit perfectly into the Nixon-Kissinger world-view and their desire to see strong regional leadership bearing more of the burden in the global Cold War ensured that he not only offered a ready, if superficial, solution to quell the worrying disturbances of the fitful 1960s in Congo, but also presented himself as a valuable ally to contain communist subversion in Africa. Even his diplomatic opening to the communist bloc and his break with Israel were readily accepted as necessary to bolstering his regional credentials, with the Congolese despot ever

³³⁸ Trevor W. Parfitt & Stephen P. Riley, *The African Debt Crisis* (Routledge; London, 1989) p. 78

³³⁹ See also Guy Gran (ed), *Zaire: the Political Economy of Underdevelopment* (New York; Praeger, 1979)

quick to reassure his American benefactors that he remained committed to their relationship. The second aspect of the American approach saw the Nixon administration actively prodding private businesses to consider investments in Congo. While this could create a superficial impression of the government as a lackey to private investors, a more careful reading of the evidence illustrates that this was actually part of a government effort to lend a further hand to the Mobutu regime by pushing the business community in his direction. The inadvertent result of these private investment inflows into a country that lacked both the necessary structures and rules to direct them, and whose finances the president viewed as extensions of his private purse, was to further exacerbate the endemic corruption, patronage and mismanagement gripping Congo.

This blinkered focus on Congo's president as a useful strategic partner, rather than the country as a whole, was, of course, a short sighted and unsustainable approach towards the region and the cracks in Congo's stability soon began to show under its increasing economic strains. Just as Mobutu's economic mismanagement had been camouflaged by a fortuitous rise in copper prices during his first term in office, as world copper prices sagged in subsequent years Congo was increasingly facing balance of payment problems and, even before Nixon's ignoble departure from office, the outlook for the Kinshasa regime was bleak.

Conclusion

Washington's failure to respond to its own accurate intelligence and the clear signs that Mobutu was leading his domain towards bankruptcy and collapse was puzzling. Clearly the 'Nixon Doctrine' would not be served by a moribund regime struggling with the decay of its own corruption. As has been seen, David Gibbs' reductionist explanation that attributes the interventions of successive administrations up to and including the Nixon White House in Congo to the underhand influence of private businesses is wholly inadequate. Far from the corporate world pulling the strings of government policy, it was the politicians who sought to harness private businesses to their own ends of strengthening the as yet fragile Mobutist state as a regional partner in the Cold War. Indeed, President Nixon and Ambassador Vance's willingness to act as prominent salesmen for 'Congo Inc.' was the clearest example of this. No doubt various private businesses were eager to use this advantage to their own ends (and Maurice Templesman's ties to Mobutu and enlistment of the former CIA Station Chief Lawrence Devlin are the clearest

example of this), but there is little evidence that they actually influenced the direction taken by the American government in its dealings with Congo throughout this period.

A more meaningful explanation for this willingness to support Mobutu's destructive regime while shrinking from a more beneficial role in constructing Congo's future can again be found in the realm of racial prejudice that continued to haunt the American approach towards Africa. Indeed, there is ample evidence for the racist undertones resonating throughout parts of Washington and the commentary of the Kinshasa country team as has been noted. Perhaps the clearest evidence of such distorted thinking can be found in ambassador Vance's effort to juxtapose American and Congolese values in a report discussing supposed cultural communication barriers along such lines,

'Some American values also puzzle Zairians. Loyalty to the extended family increases the Zairian's tolerance of nepotism, embezzlement and misrepresentation where their own relatives are concerned... Zairians find it hard to take seriously American concepts of self-reliance and personal honesty.'³⁴⁰

The notion that personal honesty and self-reliance are specifically American values is absurd, of course, and the reader is perhaps left hoping that Vance had this particular report at hand when the Watergate crisis exploded in Washington only a few months later.

Again, it would be overstating the case to suggest that the Nixon administration was deliberately pursuing racial policies towards Congo but, as the above examples indicate, such prejudices at least coloured the American view of Congo and contributed to some extent to its apparent inability to take a more critical stand towards Mobutu's transgressions. Moreover, portraying Congo's problems as alien and innate presumably presented a psychologically comforting abdication of responsibility for the American role in the country's deterioration. Congo's president, for his part, pandered to these preconceived notions as best he could by claiming time and again to derive legitimacy from his interpretation of a tribal chieftaincy.³⁴¹ As such, both the corruption and the heavy-handed repression of the Mobutu regime could be dismissed as traits specific to Congo rather than results of an illegitimate regime imposed from outside. There is, however, little to suggest

³⁴⁰ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, Washington DC, 'Communication between the US and Zaire', 7th May 1973; RG 59, Political & Defense, Box 2841, Department of State, NARAII

³⁴¹ An excellent elaboration of this phenomenon can be found in Kevin C. Dunn, *Imagining Congo* (Pallgrave Macmillan; New York, 2003)

that there was anything conscious or deliberate in these bigoted dismissals of the country's very serious and urgent troubles. In other words, just as during the Johnson years, these racist underpinnings of the American approach, while relevant, were not a central motivating factor behind American policy.

In fact, the principal theme throughout the Nixon engagement with Congo remained the Cold War. While it is often and undeniably argued that Africa was not the central priority in Nixon and Kissinger's grand strategies, at least part of the reason for this relatively low level interest can be found in the apparent assumption in Washington that Mobutu provided a readymade answer to communist infiltration on the continent. As such, his emergence as Congo's 'strongman', at least in the domestic sphere, probably impressed his American benefactors as a useful if slightly unpalatable tool in the global Cold War. As the record of Nixon's own encounters with Mobutu illustrated, the White House took the lead in defining an approach that ensured security concerns (despite the apparent absence of any Soviet interest in Congo) trumped broader development considerations while fanning both the personal vanity and the appetite for prestigious military hardware of Congo's self-declared 'father' and 'guide'. Ambassador Vance and his country team took their lead from this and it is remarkable how time and again damning intelligence was couched in overall optimistic readings of the country's prospects. Notably absent from any dissenting voices or whistle-blowers, the entire Nixon administration appeared united in its view of Mobutu as a valuable regional ally in the Cold War struggle and its corresponding uncritical support of his regime.

For Congo, America's embrace of the Kinshasa despot spelled disaster, both in the immediate and the longer-term. As has been noted, the popular relief and goodwill reportedly felt throughout much of society towards the leader who had restored a semblance of calm following the stormy 1960s was short-lived. The optimism felt at the turn of the decade was soon displaced by exasperation and foreboding amongst ordinary Congolese as it became clear that the Mobutist state would serve only the interests of its leader and the narrow few of his inner circle. This process was greatly assisted, of course, by the American executive endorsement that sought to funnel private investment into Congo directly through the Kinshasa political elite and Mobutu personally.

A certain sinister irony or 'poetic injustice' resonates through the 'Authenticity' rhetoric, as Mobutu appealed to a particular and perhaps cynically constructed version of African identity in order to enhance a parasitic rule not unlike the previous colonial state, essentially geared towards extracting maximum

revenue for a narrow elite at the expense of the majority of Congolese.³⁴² Mobutu's administration, however, appeared to do even less for ordinary citizens and completely neglected its basic governing responsibilities. Undoubtedly buoyed by his early success of quelling rebellion and overseeing the return of a semblance of order and the onset of a modicum of prosperity following the soaring copper prices of the late 1960s, the previously self-conscious, almost reluctant leader increasingly began to assert his own agenda. Apparently at the heart of this hubris was the perception that Congo was an unending source of riches ripe for the picking, and it was this basic assumption that underpinned the developing ideology of 'Mobutism'.

There is a strange paradox between this national pride in Congo's professed wealth, in part successfully evoked by Mobutu, and the notion that this justified a self-help form of corruption throughout all levels of Congolese society. This may indeed have been a rudimentary form of nation building through largess, but the 'state kleptocracy' that emerged presented a fragmented society of individuals left to fend for themselves within an institutionalised framework of corruption. Sadly, it is perhaps this feature of Mobutu's rule more than any other that survives into the present. Even today after over a decade of civil war, ordinary Congolese can be heard commenting on Congo as a treasure chest of resources while corruption, petty thievery and government shakedowns continue to be a reality of daily life.³⁴³ In other words, if one had to pick a single factor that contributes to the on going strife in today's Congo and the resulting impoverishment of its people, most informed observers would point to this endemic scourge of corruption.³⁴⁴ This debilitating political culture in turn is a clear legacy of Mobutu's rule formed in the early 1970s.

From the immediate vantage of Nixon and his team, Mobutu offered some tangible gains for the United States as their ally's regional standing improved with his diplomatic drive of 'Authenticity' and the emergence of Congo as a more acceptable voice in Africa. The consequence of this short-lived success, however, was to seemingly vindicate this somewhat myopic approach to Congo. Satisfied with the noises made by the Kinshasa despot in the international arena, Nixon courted Mobutu personally and ignored his domestic transgressions. In essence this

³⁴² For an excellent comparative study see Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (Booksraft Inc.; Michigan, 1994)

³⁴³ Based on a conversation between the author and a Congolese army captain, a navy officer and two businessmen on a ferry from Goma to Bukavu, January 2010. Mark John and Thomas Hubert, '*Minerals, Graft and Miles of Red Tape*' *New York Times*, 20-21st February 2010, p.9

³⁴⁴ For example, Thomas Turner, *The Congo Wars* (Zed Books; New York & London, 2007); esp. chapter two 'The Political Economy of Pillage'

was not substantially different to the approach taken under Johnson; a superficial engagement of Congo that relied ultimately on its relations with its elitist leader and neglected the more deep-rooted troubles clearly facing the country. That this emphasis on Mobutu, rather than the development of Congo as a whole, would prove a wholly unsustainable strategy was already becoming clear by the time of Nixon's abrupt resignation following Watergate, however, as world copper prices sagged and Congo's economic woes were increasingly exposed. Nevertheless, it was during this very period that Mobutu was transformed from an immediate solution to Congo's internal strife, apparently without much thought to the longevity of this plan, to become a mainstay of the Nixon-Kissinger strategy of warding off communist subversion on the African continent still struggling with its incomplete independence. This, of course, would prove a gross miscalculation with disastrous consequences not only for Congo but also for the American Cold War agenda. As the discussion of the American presidential endorsement illustrated, Kissinger assumed a central role in the executive engagement with Congo during this period and a secret back channel was even created between Washington's foreign policy sage and Mobutu personally. Thus, during the Nixon years the seeds for America's greatest African misadventure were sown, as Kissinger looked to rely on his Kinshasa ally when chaos loomed in Angola.

4

**Breakfast with Mobutu:
Kissinger, Congo and Defeat in Angola**

Shackled by a hostile Congress and the tacit acceptance of defeat in Vietnam and in the wake of Nixon's ignoble resignation following Watergate, the Ford-Kissinger White House appeared to be facing a crisis of legitimacy throughout the world.³⁴⁵ No doubt the SALT and Vladivostok negotiations, shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East and the deteriorating situation in Vietnam were enough to preoccupy Kissinger when, on the 25th April 1974, a group of officers in Lisbon staged a coup to oust Premier Marcello Caetano in what became known as the Carnation Revolution. It was the subsequent chain of events that unfolded in the Portuguese colony Angola that would eventually bring Africa back into sharp relief for Washington. Much has been written on the superpower confrontation in Angola in the mid 1970s. Zaki Laidi offers a lucid analytical framework of the crisis, while Piero Gleijeses and O.A. Westad give excellent accounts of the details of the unfolding conflict based on Cuban and Soviet sources respectively.³⁴⁶ A first hand and seemingly open appraisal of the CIA role by John Stockwell, the CIA's former chief of the Angolan task force, helps add colour to this picture.³⁴⁷ The impact of events in Angola on the US-Congolese relationship remains less considered, however. It is this gap in the literature that this chapter primarily seeks to remedy.

Thus far we have seen how the Lyndon Johnson administration responded to spreading violence and political turmoil in Congo by forcefully crushing the growing rebellion with a covert mercenary operation, playing an instrumental part in the Mobutu coup of 1965 and subsequently coming to the rescue of the initially flimsy dictator on numerous occasions as he consolidated his regime. By the 1970s, buoyed by the boom of high copper prices, an increasingly self-confident Mobutu had firmly established himself in a position of unrivalled power in Congo through a combination of crass political manoeuvring, a corrupt system of patronage, a shameless and pervasive personality cult and the liberal use of repression when this was deemed necessary. Washington responded to Mobutu's ascendancy in Congo, and bid for regional leadership in Africa, with an unfettered public endorsement from the Nixon-Kissinger White House, continued military and economic assistance and the active encouragement of growing private investment from the United States in Congo. As such, by the time crisis was brewing Angola in

³⁴⁵ Mark Attwood Lawrence, 'Containing Globalism', in Ferguson, Maier, Manela & Sergent (eds.) *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Belknap Press; Harvard, MA, 2010) p. 208

³⁴⁶ Butler, *Into the Storm*; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*; Laidi, *Superpowers and Africa*; Westad, *The Global Cold War*

³⁴⁷ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story*; For another colourful eye-witness rendering see Ryszard Kapuscinski, *Another Day of Life* (Penguin Classics; London, 2001)

the mid 1970s, Washington's erstwhile protégé should surely have proved a natural ally to stem a hostile tide in the region. More than simply another square in the chessboard of superpower rivalry, then, the Angolan conflict was also the first real test for America's carefully nurtured Mobutu alliance as Congo was no doubt intended as the natural bulwark against communist subversion in the region.

According to CIA analysts, the Portuguese revolution of April 1974 had given a fresh lease of to Angola's independence movements with the new leadership in Lisbon committed to ending over five hundred years of colonial rule.³⁴⁸ Angola's black population remained subject to forced labour as late as 1961 and, as Gleijeses describes, 'They were the unlucky charges of Europe's most backward colonial power.'³⁴⁹ Nevertheless, since their initial uprising in Luanda in March 1961 the fragmented independence movements, while looking to garner international support for their respective causes, had been unable and unwilling to form a united position towards independence. Thus the three main Angolan independence movements were split along geographic, ethnic and ideological lines and infighting continued in the build up to independence.

The FNLA (National Front for the Liberation of Angola) was borne out of the political upheaval of the Bakongo people of 'Lower Zaire' (or Bas-Congo) and northern Angola in the 1950s. It was the attacks from Congo into Northern Angola in March 1961 that both marked the real beginnings of the rebellion and earned its leader, Holden Roberto, a reputation for cruelty. By 1975, American observers estimated its military strength at about 10,000 troops. Having established a revolutionary government in exile in Kinshasa (GRAE) in 1962, its key weaknesses lay in Roberto's refusal to re-enter Angolan territory for fear of assassination and its narrow ethnic identification. As a State Department Study Memorandum noted, the movement's 'tribal identification has limited its popularity... It has less support in Luanda than does the MPLA or even UNITA; it has virtually no following south of Luanda- an area that includes about three fourths of the country.'

The MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) by contrast promoted, with some success, a broader appeal from all segments of the Angolan population- including whites- by stressing the national and multi-racial nature of the movement. According to the above-cited National Security Memorandum, a large part of this success could be attributed to 'the ability and high motivation of its well-educated, Marxist orientated leaders.' No doubt Agostinho Neto, the

³⁴⁸ CIA Staff Notes, Middle East, Africa, South Asia, 11th February 1975; CIA Research Search Tool (hereafter CREST), NARAI

³⁴⁹ Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa* p. 234

Portuguese educated physician and poet, grasped that a nationalist appeal couched in the ideological terms of a broader class struggle could more readily transcend ethnic divisions and unite the country towards independence. As such, the MPLA enjoyed stronger support around urban centres (and Luanda in particular), the labour unions and even Angola's white intellectuals and professionals. On the military front, Washington estimated its strength to be numerically comparable to the FNLA.

UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), the third and least powerful of the three movements, drew support from the Ovimbundu, Angola's largest ethnic group. This organisation was essentially an offshoot from the FNLA following Jonas Savimbi's split with Roberto in 1966 with a comparatively limited fighting strength estimated by the CIA at some three thousand in 1975. Finally, following almost a decade of inactivity, the fractious FLEC (Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda) remerged as two movements based in the capitals either side of the Congo River and drawing support from Kinshasa and Brazzaville respectively.³⁵⁰

Thus, even without foreign meddling or the projection of Cold War rivalries, civil strife simmered in Angola. Added to the mix of this Angolan powder keg, however, were the stakes of various regional actors, and the two Congos in particular, supporting the respective movements from beyond Angola's borders and fluctuating levels of support for the FNLA and MPLA from the United States and the Soviet Union respectively since the early 1960s. With its 1,500-mile border with Angola, its dependence on Angola's Benguela railway for its copper exports, longstanding internal strife with the largely Lunda former-gendarmes from Katanga now in exile in northern Angola and Mobutu's ethnic and family ties with the FNLA leadership; Mobutu's Congo had the most immediate stakes in the outcome of Angola's civil war out of all the external parties looking to influence these events.³⁵¹ As a result, Washington and Kinshasa no doubt viewed the other as a natural ally with common if not synonymous interests in Angola.

As crisis loomed in Angola, however, Congo was facing economic ruin and even contemporary observers from within the US administration questioned how far the

³⁵⁰ Quotes and background on the Angolan independence movements are taken from a National Security Memorandum prepared by Nathaniel Davis, NSSM 224: United States Policy Towards Angola, 16th June 1975; NSC, Institutional Files, NSSM224, Box 36, Gerald Ford Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan (hereafter GFL)

³⁵¹ Crawford Young clarifies Mobutu's 'quasi-kinship' ties to Holden Roberto whose second wife came from the same village as Mobutu's first spouse (but were not, as is at times claimed, sisters). Young and Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State* p. 376

increasingly tense alliance with Mobutu and his hapless armed forces could reliably serve American regional designs. Nevertheless, and after much prodding from Secretary Kissinger personally, Mobutu became the lynchpin of the United States' Angola strategy. The first section of this chapter will thus briefly consider the state of Congo in 1974 and the impact of its domestic woes on its relationship with Washington. Frustrated with the perceived inattention from Washington, Mobutu provoked a diplomatic crisis in an all too transparent effort to ensure Congo a central role in American regional designs. Indeed, these strains in America's principle African alliance appeared to directly influence US policy in Angola and the strategy of Secretary Kissinger in particular. A second section examines events in Angola through the prism of the US-Congo relationship. More than simply weak and unable to serve American designs in a meaningful way, there is some evidence to suggest that a wily Mobutu pursuing his own narrow interests actually drew the United States further into the Angolan quagmire. Perhaps for the first time, then, the relationship with its erstwhile protégé actually proved detrimental to the immediate material interests of the United States. A final sub-chapter will thus consider the American reaction towards Congo following defeat in Angola. A fundamental reassessment of its close ties with Kinshasa in the wake of this complete undoing in Angola could have been expected. Once again Kissinger's grip on policy, and very public efforts to shift blame to the loss of Congressional support for his Angola venture, prevented any critical reassessment or revision of Washington's Congo relationship.

In an all too familiar line espoused for the past ten years, Mobutu was deemed the sole provider of pro-Western stability in the region and mentor of American credibility in the third world. Rather than chastise him for his personal excesses or distance the United States from an increasingly unpalatable regime, Kissinger frantically sought ways to bolster the struggling Mobutu with typically disastrous consequences for the people of Congo. Ultimately, during the Angola conflict the United States' heavy reliance on Mobutu's Congo as a viable strategy for dealing with the tide of independence in sub-Saharan Africa, having defined the approaches of successive administrations since Lyndon Johnson, was finally shown as the weak reed that it was. Washington, dominated by Kissinger's overbearing personality, neither anticipated the dangers inherent in its heavy dependence on Mobutu (despite the warnings of the State Department's Africa hands and members of the embassy staff in Kinshasa) nor was it able to draw lessons from the Angola debacle to redirect its strategy towards Congo and the wider region for the future.

The Rumbblings of Discontent

It was neither the events in Angola nor Congo's economic plight, however, but the staging of the sporting event of the decade in Kinshasa on 30th October that cast the international spotlight on Mobutu's domain once more in 1974. Billed as the 'Rumble in the Jungle', the much anticipated heavyweight title fight between the brawn and athleticism of the younger George Foreman seeking to fend off the legend of Mohammad Ali became, in the minds of many, both the greatest fight and most blatant piece of hyperbolic theatre in the history of boxing. Having allegedly promised each of the fighters five million dollars which he did not have to commit to the fight, the as yet little known boxing promoter Don King was wooed by Mobutu to host the fight in Kinshasa. The crowds of onlookers, pundits and journalists that thronged to Congo's capital were not disappointed. Employing his now historic 'Rope-a-Dope' tactic, a seemingly slower and weaker Ali sapped the strength out of his opponent to deliver a defiant knock out in the eighth round that reclaimed his heavyweight title crown. While no doubt requiring a certain rhetorical leap, perhaps this display of tactical mastery and sheer force of will presaged Mobutu's own resolve and strategic acumen to defy the odds and remain at the helm of Congo in the political arena in the subsequent months.³⁵²

Indeed, from the Congolese leader's perspective, hosting the heavyweight title fight in Kinshasa was meant to be a further ostentatious display of Mobutu's power as well as a magnanimous gift to his people. Scratching beneath the surface, however, the cracks in Mobutu's display of political virility were fast appearing even to the casual contemporary observers who swarmed to Congo for the fight, as Norman Mailer's now iconic account in 'The Fight' indicates. The previous chapter has shown how Mobutu's grip on Congo was based on a mixture of patronage and repression, while the majority of the country was left largely unimpressed by the blatant propaganda of the president's increasingly pervasive personality cult. This stick-and-carrot rule in turn depended upon a functioning economy to ensure sufficient rewards for his loyal but interchangeable elite and the army in particular. As the decade reached its halfway mark, however, Congo's economy was sputtering and this system appeared increasingly unviable.

Throughout this period the Congolese economy was almost exclusively reliant on its extractive copper industry essentially run by foreign technicians. As the

³⁵² Norman Mailer, *The Fight*; Leon Gast's Documentary: *When We Were Kings* (1996, Polygram Entertainment)

world copper price sagged and production costs rose in the midst of a global energy crisis, the mining life raft that had kept afloat an otherwise badly mismanaged economy was rapidly deflating. The devastating impact of the 'Zairianisation' program together with the foolhardy misallocation of capital has been discussed. Coupled with this was a growing urbanization and neglect of the agricultural sector that led to both sharp increases in the cost of living and made Congo ever more dependent on foreign imports.³⁵³ Rather than reign in government excesses, however, Mobutu preferred to counteract the growing shortfall of capital with further borrowing. By March 1975, the CIA was reporting increasing nervousness amongst creditors, especially from American and Belgian banks, and Congo's economic plight was under scrutiny from the IMF likely to recommend, 'stringent controls that Mobutu may find unpalatable.'³⁵⁴ More than unpalatable, Mobutu resisted the IMF recommendations throughout 1975 in the hope of another resurgence of copper prices that had bailed him out before and managed to secure short-term credit from Germany and France to keep Congo afloat, even if only on an interim basis.³⁵⁵ This economic malaise, however, not only continued to undermine his domestic standing as has been considered in the previous chapter but it also put a new strain on his relationship with his American allies. Thus the CIA observed the tension between Mobutu's economic dependence on the United States and his increasing frustration with a perceived neglect from his Washington partners. In an almost prophetic conclusion, the CIA summarized, 'In his present mood, Mobutu is likely to translate this hesitancy (for further credit) into "economic sabotage" and fight back with diplomatic attacks, in which case the US would be a particularly inviting target.'³⁵⁶

Indeed, by 1975 the cosy Kinshasa-Washington relationship was palpably souring. The first clear indication of this occurred already in January when US ambassador Deane R. Hinton, who replaced Sheldon Vance in Kinshasa in 1974, reported Mobutu's calls for the Peace Corps to be removed from the country as certain members had been heard making disparaging remarks about the Kinshasa government. At the same time, Mobutu publically criticised the appointment of Nathaniel Davis as the new Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs for his

³⁵³ State Department analysts noted that the agricultural sector only received an estimated 2% of government-sponsored investment and food imports were increasing by some 10% annually from the early 1970s adding to the balance of payments crisis. State Department, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, 'Zaire: A Poor Prognosis', 28th December, 1976; FRUS Volume E-6

³⁵⁴ CIA, Staff Notes: Middle East, Africa, South Asia, 20th March 1975; CREST, NARAI

³⁵⁵ CIA, Staff Notes: Middle East, Africa, South Asia, 14th July 1975; CREST, NARAI

³⁵⁶ CIA, Staff Notes: Middle East, Africa, South Asia, 20th March 1975; CREST, NARAI

role as Ambassador in Chile at the time of Allende's murder.³⁵⁷ The subsequent cable traffic between Washington and Kinshasa saw the embassy caution against Kissinger's desire for a strong demarche against what he saw as Mobutu's meddling in American domestic politics, 'Few things would give me greater personal gratification than conveying your views directly to President Mobutu,' Hinton wrote, 'However, there are other considerations, including, but not limited to the selfish one that this place is just nutty enough that I would like to stay here a bit longer.'³⁵⁸ Not only did this reveal Mobutu's growing frustrations but it is also suggestive of the diminishing influence Washington could hope to exert on Kinshasa if its ambassador risked being sent packing over seemingly minor disagreements.

Perhaps this incident, and the subsequent failure to respond from Washington, also tells of the difficulties in the personal relationship between Ambassador Hinton and the increasingly disgruntled Mobutu. Indeed, that June Hinton was the target of Mobutu's next and most audacious denouncing of the United States when Kinshasa's state controlled newspapers accused the ambassador of collusion in an apparent plot to assassinate Congo's leader, expelled him from the country and declared him persona non grata. According to the US Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission in Kinshasa, Lannon Walker, it was the former's lecturing tone on economic matters and the need for austerity that riled Mobutu and preceded the most significant diplomatic spat in US-Congolese relations thus far.³⁵⁹ The temerity of this accusation is all the more striking in view of Mobutu's own rise to power ten years earlier. Thus, in a thinly veiled reference that conveniently omitted its own role in the coup of November 1965, the CIA observed,

'The Zairian leader began his political career in a period of intrigue and turmoil, and he participated in those intrigues. He no doubt accepts plots against a head of state as a fact of life- a point of view probably sharpened by his awareness of growing restiveness in the army.'³⁶⁰

On the one hand, these incidents illustrated the huge expectations Mobutu had for his backers in Washington to continue their untrammelled support, the extent to which he depended on this as well as the corresponding exacerbation of the increasingly isolated leader's perceived neglect. At the same time, Mobutu's

³⁵⁷ Hinton, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 21st January 1975, 'Mobutu's Speech to African American Institute Conference'; FRUS Volume E-6

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa* (UNC Press, 2002) p. 289

³⁶⁰ CIA, Staff Notes: Middle East, Africa, South Asia, 14th July 1975; CREST, NARAI

readiness to denounce his long-term benefactor indicated the superficial nature of the relationship that could only last as long as he felt he was reaping direct material rewards and strategic benefits from his engagement with Washington. Most importantly, however, these episodes demonstrated the need for a united front within the Washington administration and the Congo country team if the United States was to translate its considerable leverage into a positive influence on the wily and wilful Kinshasa despot and his apparent efforts to manipulate his American ally.

The incredulous reactions from the CIA and State Department officials indicate that this time there was no truth in the claims of an American role in the coup plotting. In fact, reports on Congo were most usually couched in terms of the impact any particular event may have on Mobutu's hold on power rather than any thoughts of his removal. The fact that Congo's president provoked an open confrontation with his most significant patron at a time of mounting domestic unrest and increasing dangers from beyond Congo's borders appears surprising at first glance. Far from irrational, however, the CIA noted a clear strategy behind these actions. On the one hand, any public criticism of the US served as a useful affirmation of Mobutu's non-aligned credentials in his quest for status as a leading African statesman. Furthermore, from a domestic point of view such a public confrontation served as a handy distraction providing an excuse for a strong government crackdown and yet another purge of the army under cries of 'economic sabotage'. The most important calculation for Mobutu, however, appears to have been the reaction he was looking to provoke from Washington.³⁶¹

Time and again Mobutu had stressed his sense of vulnerability to his American allies as his domestic standing deteriorated and armed conflict spread across Congo's southern border in Angola. Appeals for economic aid to alleviate budgetary constraints and military assistance both for his government directly and for the Congo based National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) were met with perceived indifference and empty promises. As such, neither the personal appeals to Kissinger as early as August 1974 nor Major General James M. Rockwell's (Chief of the US Technical Advisory Team to Congo) first military mission the following March yielded any tangible results to satisfy Mobutu.³⁶² Like a neglected lover

³⁶¹ The CIA gave a frank evaluation of all these factors possibly underlying the allegations emanating from Kinshasa. DCI (Director of Central Intelligence, William Colby) Briefing for 19th June SRG Meeting (Senior Review Group Meeting): Angola, 19th June 1975; CIA, Staff Notes: Middle East, Africa, South Asia, 14th July 1975; CREST, NARAH

³⁶² Walker, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 2nd September 1975, Presidential Country Files for Africa, 1974-77, Box 7, NSA, GFL

looking for acknowledgment, these increasingly shrill denouncements of the US appear to have been specifically designed to rouse some kind of reaction from the inattentive benefactor. Mobutu played his part as the spurned but loyal ally with considerable skill. On the one hand he appeared to be setting the United States a clear ultimatum: if Washington did not react to his pleas and the dire straits his country found itself in it could expect the loss, and potential collapse, of a vociferous ally in Africa. At the same time, Congo's leader was careful not to close any doors, levelling his criticisms indirectly through the official newspapers at ambassador Hinton personally, rather than the Washington administration more broadly, thus maintaining open diplomatic relations with the United States throughout.

In sum then, as the 1970s reached the halfway point, a decade of economic mismanagement, largess and corruption, exacerbated by plummeting copper prices and matched by a repressive state apparatus, combined to leave Congo ruined and the Kinshasa government deprived of legitimacy. Unwilling to address this internal decay head on, Mobutu continued to count on support from beyond his borders and the United States in particular. Indeed, the extent to which he was willing to manipulate confrontations with his long-term patron to this end was remarkable. Taking his lead from the resounding support voiced by the Nixon-Kissinger White House, Congo's president seemingly felt secure that his calculations would pay dividend. As a result, no doubt the most interesting aspect of this story was the reaction from Washington. Walker expected a sharp reprimand from Kissinger similar to the rebuff following Mobutu's attack on Nathaniel Davis earlier in the year.³⁶³ Far from this, however, the Secretary of State appeared to panic in the face of this Congolese pressure and immediately sent Ambassador Vance, the old and reliable confidant of Congo's president, on a diplomatic reconciliation mission to Kinshasa. This placid reaction can only be understood in terms of events unfolding across Congo's southern border in Angola. In other words, caught in an increasingly untenable domestic situation, Mobutu calculated that a Kissinger-dominated Washington, with its preponderance for viewing events in Africa in terms of their geostrategic Cold-War implications, would not abandon an ally who might play a key role in the conflict unfolding across its southern border. These considerations no doubt encouraged Mobutu in his own Angola foray and in turn shaped American strategy towards the conflict.

³⁶³ Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa* (UNC Press, 2002) p. 289

Breakfast with Mobutu: the Genesis of Kissinger's Angola Strategy

Ambassador Hinton was declared a *persona non grata* by the Kinshasa government in June 1974. By the time Sheldon Vance made his third reconciliation trip to Kinshasa that September, however, he was once more greeted with full diplomatic fanfare and corresponding press conferences and the embassy noted, 'Mobutu has clearly decided to signal to the public that full reconciliation of good relations between US has occurred.'³⁶⁴ It had taken a mere three months for Mobutu to make an about turn from accusing members of the American administration of plotting his downfall to once more publically posturing with his erstwhile allies. Earlier tensions were quickly and conveniently forgotten. The speed of this increasingly public reconciliation reflects the close interplay between Washington and Kinshasa from that summer in the unfolding Angolan conflict. Perhaps it also serves as an indication of how Mobutu's brash but shrewd calculations utterly outmanoeuvred Kissinger on the African stage. The Congolese despot had ample reasons of his own for wishing to influence and control events across the Angolan border but from the American Secretary of State's vantage this was viewed as a common interest in the global Cold War struggle. When Mobutu's own interventions began to falter in Angola, he looked to the United States for further support and, when this was not immediately forthcoming, cried foul in the fabricated Hinton affair. It was out of this, and Kissinger's somewhat hysterical reaction, that a renewed and fatally flawed partnership to direct the course of events in Angola was born. As such, the Angolan conflict that began in earnest in the latter half of 1974 can be divided into two distinct phases.

Initially, despite some low level support and the best efforts of the various factions to appeal to super power sensibilities, the civil war remained an essentially regional affair with Mobutu's National Army (FAZ) the dominant foreign force embroiled in the turmoil.³⁶⁵ Following the deteriorating prospects of Mobutu's Angola venture and his very deliberate provocation of his American backer, the United States entered the fray in support of the FNLA just as South Africa launched its own direct military intervention to bolster UNITA in southern Angola. Correspondingly the Soviet Union escalated its military assistance while Cuba launched a direct military intervention in support of the MPLA in the latter half of 1975 in the second phase of the conflict increasingly defined by the Cold War

³⁶⁴ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Third Vance Mission: First Meeting with Mobutu', September 19th 19th September 1975; NSA, Presidential Country Files for Africa 1974-77, Box 7, GFL

³⁶⁵ 'Force Armées Zaïrois' (FAZ), the ANC's new acronym following Congo's renaming after 1971.

superpower confrontation.³⁶⁶ As such, this section examines the role played by Mobutu in drawing his long-term ally into the Angolan war that not only once more aligned Washington with the reactionary elements of white minority rule but, with its all too predictable inability to match the Soviet-Cuban escalation, resulted in the first notable Cold War defeat of the United States in Africa.

Mobutu's stakes in Angola were in part a result of historic constellations and allegiances, in part a reflection of immediate economic interests and in part simply an extension of Congo's own domestic woes and the Kinshasa government's increasingly fragile position. On the one hand, Mobutu himself had personal ties to the FNLA leader Holden Roberto who operated from Kinshasa. While his familial loyalty proved dubious as Mobutu increasingly pursued his own narrow aims, since their defeat during the secessionist years in the early 1960s the largely Lunda former gendarmes from Katanga in exile across the Angolan border constituted a permanent concern to the central government in Kinshasa.³⁶⁷ In addition to these historic burdens, the chief route for Katanga's copper exports was through Angola's Benguela Railway link, placing Congo's principle income dangerously at the mercy of events across its southern border. Mobutu's personal ambitions to cultivate Congo as a powerful regional force in Africa no doubt ran parallel to these very real material interests. Indeed, his desire to play an active role in the Angolan civil war was as much an effort to bolster his credentials as a grand African statesman as it was a seemingly conscious diversion from Congo's own domestic woes and an engineered distraction for the restless FAZ, his power base at home. As a result, when simmering rivalries boiled over into armed confrontation with each of the rebel movements rushing to establish control over the fledgling country ahead of the newly set November 11th 1975 deadline for independence, Mobutu was gripped perhaps as much by trepidation as by a sense of opportunity to exploit the turmoil to his south for his own ends.³⁶⁸

The seeds for a broader Cold War escalation had been sown, of course, with the long-standing if low-level support for the MPLA and FNLA from the Soviet Union and the United States respectively dating back to the early 1960s. Indeed, the MPLA appeared to receive some material assistance from the Soviet Union even in the

³⁶⁶ Butler, *Into the Storm*; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*; Laidi, *Superpowers in Africa*; Westad, *Global Cold War*

³⁶⁷ CIA Staff Notes, Middle East, Africa, South Asia, No. 0428/74, 11th February 1975; CREST, NARAI. Also, Crawford Young and Thomas Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985) p. 376

³⁶⁸ Kissinger, NSC Meeting, 27th June 1975; Institutional Files, NSSM 24: United States Policy Towards Angola, Box 36, NSC, GFL

early stages of the conflict.³⁶⁹ No doubt in part to counter this as relations between the Soviet Union and China (PRC) deteriorated; at Mobutu's behest the PRC had also been offering some military assistance and training to the FNLA in Congo.³⁷⁰ The point is, while all this would have done little to assuage Washington's Cold War preoccupations over the spreading turmoil in Angola, the above suggests that Mobutu's priorities in Angola had little to do with the American Cold War agenda. As such, a blinkered support of the Congolese president acting very much in his own narrow interest was fraught with dangers for American interests. Key to Mobutu's ability to play an active role in the spreading violence, however, was the continuing American military aid that constituted the mainstay of the FAZ. As such, the final but perhaps most significant ingredient in Mobutu's Angola designs was tacit American support. To be sure, Mobutu did not wait for official marching orders from Washington but Kissinger's readiness to give the green light to an active Congolese role in the troubles brewing in Angola must have delighted Congo's leader. In this way, the Secretary told Congo's Commissioner of State for Foreign Affairs Umba-di-Lutete already in August 1974 that, 'If you (Congo) support one Angolan leader, and the communists support another, I have confidence you will succeed.'³⁷¹ This underlined not only Kissinger's early willingness to rely on Mobutu to a considerable extent but also ensured that the United States was at least indirectly involved in the spreading violence in Angola as the FAZ made its first cross-border raids.

Initially, Mobutu's support of Roberto and his readiness to commit his own troops to fight alongside the FNLA appeared successful. While the exact events of the Angola conflict are difficult to reconstruct and considerable debate remains over the exact relative strength and assistance received by the respective movements, initially Mobutu's gamble seemed to be paying off as the FNLA rallied in the early months of 1975. For its part, the CIA clearly believed in the superiority of Roberto's forces at this stage as memorandum that March confidently stated, 'His (Neto) organisation (MPLA), however, is outmanned and outgunned by the National Front and would lose a military confrontation even if it were to receive massive

³⁶⁹ CIA Staff Notes, Middle East, Africa, South Asia, 10th June 1975; CREST, NARAI

³⁷⁰ According to the CIA, Congo was granted 100 million USD credit by China following Mobutu's first visit and gifts of some 30 tanks, artillery pieces and small arms, as well as sending arms and instructors to the FNLA training camps in Congo. Pyongyang offered to sell light arms and artillery to equip 12-13,000 men and provide a 112-man military advisory team for the FAZ. CIA, Staff Notes: Middle East, Africa, South Asia, 20th March 1975; CREST, NARAI

³⁷¹ Cutler, Memorandum of Conversation: 'US-Zaire Relations', Participants: Commissioner of State for Foreign Affairs Umba-di-Lutete, Secretary Kissinger, Acting Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Mulcahy, Director AF/C Cutler, 12th August 1974, Washington D.C.; FRUS, Volume E-6

assistance from Moscow or Lisbon, which seems unlikely.³⁷² Indeed, by May a Portuguese delegation to Kinshasa sought to persuade Mobutu to desist from sending further troops into Angola.³⁷³ Such optimism by the CIA would very swiftly prove to be misplaced and the military tide soon turned, as much due to more effective resistance from the MPLA as it was a result of the internal flaws of the FNLA-Kinshasa alliance.

Gleijeses stresses the MPLA's organisational superiority in holding off further FNLA advances but by March the Soviet Union was also offsetting the military imbalance with its first airlifts of equipment.³⁷⁴ On the other hand, the FNLA was weakened by Roberto's refusal to leave the safety of Congo and head to the front while the organisational and operational weaknesses of the FAZ as an effective fighting force have been amply documented. At the same time, increasingly under pressure from Congo's own economic crisis, Mobutu's Angola adventure was simply proving too expensive for the cash-strapped leader and by June his aid was drying up. The CIA took note,

'We are unable to determine how much Soviet military aid is now reaching the Movement, but it seems to have enabled the Movement to score some gains during the recent fighting... Recently Mobutu has cut back his assistance to the Front because of his government's serious financial problems.'³⁷⁵

This shift in military balance presented Mobutu with a serious problem. On the one hand, having aligned himself so closely with Roberto and the FNLA, an MPLA victory would present the unpleasant possibility of a Soviet backed hostile regime to his immediate South. More immediately still, by committing his own FAZ troops to the FNLA cause in an unpopular war from a Congolese perspective, Mobutu had staked his personal prestige on the outcome of the Angola crisis. As has been seen in previous chapters, the president's grip on Congo was heavily dependent on the army. Thus, when the FAZ faltered so did the foundations of Mobutu's rule in Congo. In other words, the timing of the coup allegations levelled at ambassador Hinton was calculated and immaculate. Just as Washington was taking note that the Angolan situation was deteriorating, the FNLA was suffering setbacks and the Soviet Union was playing a hand in equipping the MPLA; America's closest and most vaunted ally in the region cried foul and was publically questioning his ties with

³⁷² Central Intelligence Agency, DCI, Memorandum: 'Proposed Aid to Angola Refugees' 25th March, 1975; CREST, NARAI

³⁷³ Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa* (UNC Press, 2002) p. 252

³⁷⁴ Zaki Laidi, *The Superpowers and Africa: Constraints of a Rivalry, 1960-1990* p. 66

³⁷⁵ DCI Briefing for 19th June SRG Meeting: Angola, 19th June 1975; CREST, NARAI

Washington. No doubt the cynical nature of these actions was plainly apparent and the first of a number of explanations given by the CIA ran as follows, 'He (Mobutu) is alarmed by the rising violence in Angola and may feel his ability to influence developments there is slipping. He has been unable to convince the US to take a more active role there by supporting Roberto's Liberation Front.'³⁷⁶

While understanding Mobutu's ploy was one thing, finding an adequate response in terms of the deteriorating Angola situation was quite another, however. As a result, it is worth taking a step back and considering the wider debate unfolding over the US Angola policy at this time in Washington. Immediate American interests in Angola in 1975 were deemed 'important but by no means vital'. On the economic sphere, private investments consisted some four hundred million dollars, of which Gulf Oil investments in Cabinda constituted the lion's share, and the State Department noted the abundance of minerals in Angola. Angola also held some strategic importance as a communication link between the American East coast and the Indian Ocean, heightened by the lack of US access to ports and airfields in other nearby countries.³⁷⁷

Indeed, in response to Assistant National Security Advisor, Lt. General Brent Scowcroft's probing questions the Interdepartmental Group on Africa prepared a memorandum under the provocative if slightly long-winded title, 'Implications for US Interests if we were to do nothing and the MPLA were to come out on top'.³⁷⁸ A somewhat ambivalent piece, this paper concluded that, with growing nationalisation trends in the developing world, that the eventual loss of the Cabinda oil fields was likely irrespective of the outcome of the Angola crisis. While the loss of access to ports and airfields may also result with an MPLA victory, relations both between Angola and the United States and Western Europe would most likely continue. The main concern flagged in this evaluation was the impact for the stability of the region and the consequences for détente in southern Africa. None of the above appeared to constitute a strong case for an active American involvement, however. Indeed, of the three options considered- ranging from complete inaction and a policy of neutrality, a diplomatic effort to end outside meddling and facilitate a peaceful resolution to an active covert support of the FNLA and UNITA- the above

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ George S. Springsteen, Special Assistant to the Secretary of State, Memorandum for Lt. General Brent Scowcroft, 'Issue Paper on Angola', 14th June 1975; Presidential Country Files for Africa, Box 1, NSA, GFL

³⁷⁸ Lt. General Brent Scowcroft replaced Kissinger as National Security Adviser in October 1975. George S. Springsteen to Lt. General Brent Scowcroft, Special Sensitive Memorandum Regarding Response to NSSM 224: 'Implications for US Interests If We Do Nothing and the MPLA Were to Come Out On Top'; Institutional Files, NSSM 224: United States Policy Towards Angola, Box 36, NSC, GFL

paper concluded, 'the uncertainties of the situation in Angola make the risks of becoming directly involved greater than probable gains derived there from...'³⁷⁹ The State Department, and Nathaniel Davis and Edward W. Mulcahy (the assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs) in particular, concurred. On June 16th Davis and the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa concluded its 84 page National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM 224) with a stark warning over the high risk of exposure of any covert operation, the likelihood of a resulting increased level of violence in Angola (with all this entailed before Congress and the American public), the uncertainty of its outcome and that, even if successful, there was no guarantee that Roberto and Savimbi would act in the United States' interest once in power.³⁸⁰

Kissinger did not agree. Mobutu's manoeuvres had clearly caught his attention and from June the Secretary of State began to advocate an increasingly activist stance. In a meeting called to discuss Washington's response to Hinton's expulsion a slightly hysterical Kissinger stressed, 'we are in the process of installing a communist regime by total default... The concept of free elections in Angola boggles my mind... It will end up in Angola as it did in the Congo. Someone will get on top by force.'³⁸¹ The impact of events in Angola on the stability of the Kinshasa regime remained a prevalent theme for policy makers and NSSM 224 itself considered these implications at length. Tied to this was Kissinger's seemingly constant agonising over American credibility as he reflected on how Congo's leader might interpret American inaction, 'my concern is Mobutu must think that a country which permits a country as rich as Angola to go communist has written off the area. He has to be drawing his conclusions for himself.'³⁸²

Mobutu had successfully repositioned himself in the centre of American policy deliberations with his accusations of American plotting. Rather than an opportunity for Hinton to confront Congo's President as proposed by Mulcahy, or indeed any other form of reprimand, Kissinger responded by sending the leader's 'close friend', Ambassador Sheldon Vance, on a diplomatic reconciliation mission with the express intention of sounding Mobutu out on what could be done in Angola. Thus the Secretary exclaimed,

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Davis to Scowcroft, 'NSSM 224: United States Policy Towards Angola', 16th June 1975; Institutional Files, NSSM 224: United States Policy Towards Angola, Box 36, NSC, GFL

³⁸¹ Memorandum of Conversation; Subject: Africa; Participants: The Secretary, Deputy Secretary Ingersoll, Under Secretary Sisco, Acting Assistant Secretary AF Mulcahy, Country Director for Central AF Walt Cutler (Meeting in Secretary's Office, 18th June 1975); FRUS, Volume E-6

³⁸² Ibid.

'I want to hear what he wants us to do there. He must think we are out of our damn minds to have Cabinda go and to have the whole country go communist without doing anything... I know the AF (African Affairs) view. I want to hear Mobutu's view. I want to get an unvarnished view and I want him (Vance) to convey to Mobutu that we are not milktoasts. I want Mobutu to have an adult conversation with us.'³⁸³

Three days later the former ambassador to Congo arrived in Kinshasa for this adult conversation.

Vance's Kinshasa visit produced exactly the results both Kissinger and Mobutu might have hoped for. By the time of his third meeting with Congo's president in as many days, Vance reported on the 26th June that Mobutu's protestations were 'palpably diminishing in fervour' and the disagreement over the alleged coup-plotting had faded into the background.³⁸⁴ From the very outset, however, Mobutu proposed a solution to what had now become a joint American-Congolese Angola predicament that could have been scripted by Kissinger himself. In a telegram titled 'Breakfast with Mobutu', Vance paraphrased the Congolese leader's plan, 'Under today's circumstances it is obvious that the US cannot help directly; but it is known that the US has helped Zaire militarily and that Zaire has helped Roberto, so that modalities for our possible assistance are clearly indicated.'³⁸⁵ In other words, Mobutu was again calling for US assistance to the FNLA and UNITA and presenting Congo as the most obvious and convenient conduit for any such assistance.

It is likely, of course, that such a ploy was already at the back of Kissinger's mind. Clearly he was thinking along these lines by the time of his emergency meeting on the expulsion of Hinton as he mused, 'Money is not the problem but the degree of commitment. I'm not sure. Perhaps we can push Mobutu out front. It simply cannot be in our interest to have Angola go communist.'³⁸⁶ What is certain, however, is that Mobutu effectively provoked a diplomatic crisis to bring Congo back into contention at exactly the time when Washington was deliberating over Angola. More than this, he then presented himself as a regional ally with a readymade solution to the Angola crisis in exactly the terms that would appeal to Kissinger's vision of foreign affairs. For the Secretary of State, Mobutu appeared to

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Third Meeting with Mobutu: Abortive Coup', 26th June 1975; Presidential Country Files For Africa, 1974-77, Box 7, NSA, GFL

³⁸⁵ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Breakfast with Mobutu', 23rd June 1975; Presidential Country Files For Africa, 1974-77, Box 7, NSA, GFL

³⁸⁶ Memorandum of Conversation; Subject: Africa; Participants: The Secretary, Deputy Secretary Ingersoll, Under Secretary Sisco, Acting Assistant Secretary AF Mulcahy, Country Director for Central AF Walt Cutler (Meeting in Secretary's Office, 18th June 1975); FRUS, Volume E-6

provide both the justification and the means for a successful Angola operation and Kissinger presented his views to the National Security Council in exactly these terms within a day of Vance's trip,

'If these diplomatic efforts fail where do we go? Do we fall back on a posture of neutrality, or become more actively involved, perhaps, as President Mobutu has suggested to Sheldon Vance, through a third party... One of the most viable options at this juncture, in my opinion, would be to extend aid to President Mobutu as an offset to enable him to provide military and other support to Holden and Savimbi. From his conversations with Vance, Mobutu appears prepared to cooperate with us. An important side-benefit would be improved US-Zairian relations.'³⁸⁷

Mobutu's posturing and timing had been flawless. With this the 'missionary' doubters of the Africa bureau had been outmanoeuvred. On July 17th the 40 Committee approved a covert CIA operation dubbed IAFEATURE to assist the FNLA and UNITA in Angola.³⁸⁸ Two days later President Ford approved a fifty million dollar aid program to Zaire.³⁸⁹

For Congo's president the rewards were immediate. He had brought his Congo back into the American fold and a string of diplomatic visits from American officials followed. Ambassador Vance returned twice in rapid succession the following July and September to hammer out details of their collaboration and William E. Schaufele (Nathaniel Davis's replacement as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs) and his deputy Edward W. Mulcahy each followed suit later that year. More tangible, however, was the American commitment for economic aid so desperately needed in Congo. Again the details of the proposed aid package presented a difference of opinion between Kissinger and the technocrats of the Africa Department.

By July 1975, Congo was approaching financial bankruptcy. In a memorandum on the proposed aid, Nathaniel Davis summarised the situation as follows,

'The precipitating cause of Zaire's present financial difficulties is a huge run-up in Zaire's short-term commercial indebtedness at the end of 1974, largely to French and Belgian Banks. We estimate that Zaire's short-term indebtedness now stands at about \$ 550 million. Zaire's current foreign earnings, reduced by

³⁸⁷ NSC Meeting on Angola, 'Talking Points for Secretary Kissinger', 27th June 1975; Presidential Country Files for Africa, 1974-1977, Box 1, NSA, GFL

³⁸⁸ Nathaniel Davis, *'The Angola Decision' Foreign Affairs* (Fall 1978); John Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*; Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*

³⁸⁹ Memorandum from Connor for Lynn (OMB) and Kissinger, 19th July 1975; Staff Secretary James E. Connor, Box 37, GFL

the sharp decline in copper prices over the past year, are not sufficient to service Zaire's debt and to pay for essential goods and service imports.'

In order to restore investor confidence and move the country back towards a path of recovery an IMF stabilisation program of austerity and fiscal prudence was required but remained unpalatable to Mobutu. As such, Davis commented on the IMF offer for 105 million dollars in balance of payment support, to be disbursed in thirty-five million dollar instalments tied to stringent commitments,

'Mobutu would probably not accept the financial restraints the Fund would require for Zaire to tap more than a \$ 70 million drawing, but IMF involvement is the key to the establishment of the confidence of the international financial community. Mobutu has opposed recourse to the IMF as unnecessary and a menace to Zaire's national dignity.'

Nevertheless, Davis concluded, 'We, the IMF, and his creditors believe greater restraint in budgetary expenditures and better allocation of available foreign exchange are essential to restore Zaire's economic health.'³⁹⁰

The case for more stringent oversight of Mobutu's financial dealings was overwhelming and both the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Treasury concurred. OMB Director Lynn stressed precisely this need for IMF involvement in a memorandum directly to the President on July 17th,

'Secretary Simon (Treasury) and I believe that failure to tie US Assistance to an IMF agreement will undermine the IMF and is likely to leave the United States in the position of having to provide even more aid in the future. I do not believe that the short-term creditors are in a position to impose reasonable financial reforms because they want to get their money back on payments which are already in default.'³⁹¹

Unfortunately, the Secretary of State again did not agree.

Kissinger was not willing to jeopardise his rekindled relationship with Mobutu for the sake of Congo's economic development. Lynn's final decision memorandum presented to President Ford thus included an add-on from Kissinger detailing Congo's economic and political importance to the United States and concluding, 'We realise that from a purely economic standpoint it makes sense to insist on an IMF stabilization program. However, we believe that the stakes in Zaire are so important that we must be in a position to offer Zaire assistance even if Mobutu continues to

³⁹⁰ Davis to Kissinger, Memorandum: 'US Assistance to Zaire', 3rd July 1975; FRUS, Volume E-6

³⁹¹ Lynn, Memorandum for the President: 'Foreign Aid Budget Amendment for Zaire', 17th July 1975; Staff Secretary James E. Connor, Box 37, GFL

resist the IMF.³⁹² Once again Kissinger dominated policy and on 19th July Ford approved the fifty million dollar aid program (including a fourteen million dollar budget increase) to Congo without conditions. While Vance was to urge adoption of the IMF reform package, no such prodding can be found in the reports of his meetings with Mobutu the following week.³⁹³ Remarkably, within little more than a month Mobutu had effectively engineered a diplomatic confrontation and harnessed the deteriorating situation in Angola to ensure his resurrection as the centrepiece of American policy towards the region. The obvious benefits from his perspective were not only the continuation of his military foray into Angola but the unconditional American economic support that came part and parcel with this and permitted Congo's economically defunct government to continue to grind along, if only on an uncertain interim basis.

At the heart of Mobutu's success lay Kissinger's consistent eagerness to see the fostered Mobutu regime as an effective regional ally. No doubt the Secretary viewed events in Angola and Congo very much in terms of the traditional Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. In imagining Mobutu shared these exact concerns, rather than any more mundane but perhaps immediately pressing needs of his own, Kissinger neglected to appreciate the very specific circumstances under which his ally was operating. Unfortunately, the dissenting views of those members of the administration that perhaps had a better understanding of these details were bulldozed or ignored in the Secretary of State's complete domination over the formulation of the American Congo/Angola policy. It remains to be seen how effective this policy would prove in the following months.

The pitfalls for Congo of this unfettered support for Mobutu were clear even before the merits of Kissinger's Angola venture could be gauged. Thus, in September, just as the CIA's IAFEATURE was gaining momentum, Lannon Walker warned of the hazards in supporting a fragile but increasingly assertive and uncontrollable Mobutu,

'I am concerned that under present circumstances Mobutu believes we can and will support him all the way. And I don't believe we can. If it turns out we can't I predict that he will have fatally overcommitted himself; he has wrecked his

³⁹² Henry Kissinger, Memorandum for the President: 'Mr. Lynn's Memo to the President Concerning a Foreign Aid Budget Amendment for Zaire- Add On', 17th July 1975; Presidential Country Files for Africa, 1974-1977, Box 1, NSA, GFL

³⁹³ Memorandum for George S. Springsteen: 'Foreign Aid Budget Amendment for Zaire', 19th July 1975; Presidential Country Files for Africa, 1974-1977, Box 1, NSA, GFL
Three telegrams on 22nd July 1975 from Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State; Presidential Country Files for Africa, 1974-1977, Box 7, NSA, GFL

economy, alienated literally every power centre in Zaire and survived thus far by sheer political genius and force of will.’³⁹⁴

Walker correctly assessed the dangers inherent in Mobutu’s assumption that his regime could once more rely on a steadfast and uncritical American backing, ‘The lesson is that Mobutu knows we have done very well by him, he also believes- I repeat believes- that he can and will do much more. All he has to do is pull the right strings.’³⁹⁵ As such, the Deputy Chief of Mission concluded with the recommendation,

‘Therefore, unless we are certain we can provide the increased financial and military resources which will inevitably be required by the current trends- we had better tell Mobutu to slow down in Angola and Cabinda and turn to work on his economic problems. I do not meant that we should cease our support to Mobutu, the FNLA and UNITA, but rather that the limit of such support be clearly defined.’³⁹⁶

Washington’s reaction to this sage advice was Sheldon Vance’s third visit to Kinshasa the following week, which produced a long shopping list for military supplies- including a further C-130 transport plane, helicopters and jeeps- and US approval for increased Foreign Military Sales (FMS) credits to Congo to assist this process. Any cautioning of Mobutu’s revived enthusiastic military expansionism was noticeably absent from the discussions.³⁹⁷ In other words, Kissinger’s Angola program was at the heart of Mobutu’s resistance to domestic reform in this period. Moreover, any suggestions to use the leverage inherent in this partnership to reign in his excesses, or at least prevent future follies, were simply ignored by Washington.

No doubt of much greater concern to the Ford administration, however, was the effectiveness of the US-Congolese partnership in steering the Angolan civil war as operation IAFEATURE began in earnest from July. The exact events on the ground of the Angola war during the second half of 1975 remain at least partially shrouded in mystery due to conflicting accounts. With their respective use of Cuban and Soviet sources, Gleijeses and Westad differ in their assessment of the MPLA’s military fortunes that autumn, the former offering a much more optimistic appraisal. What

³⁹⁴ Walker, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, ‘Zaire Economic Situation/Angola War’, 10th September 1975; Presidential Country Files for Africa, 1974-1977, Box 7, NSA, GFL

³⁹⁵ Walker, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, ‘Mobutu’s Expectations’, 12th September 1975; Presidential Country Files for Africa, 1974-1977, Box 7, NSA, GFL

³⁹⁶ Walker, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, ‘Zaire Economic Situation/Angola War’, 10th September 1975; Presidential Country Files for Africa, 1974-1977, Box 7, NSA, GFL

³⁹⁷ Vance, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, ‘Third Vance Mission: First Meeting with Mobutu’, September 19th 19th September 1975; NSA, Presidential Country Files for Africa 1974-77, Box 7, GFL

appears clear for the purposes of this chapter is the increasing internationalisation of the conflict. Alongside the American efforts, several score of former officers and mercenaries from Portugal stiffened the FNLA while the South African government assisted Savimbi's UNITA in the south from July and eventually launched its own direct military intervention from Namibia on October 14th.³⁹⁸ At least by this stage then the FNLA/UNITA drive for Luanda was gaining momentum and US policy appeared to be paying dividend.

With the MPLA thus sandwiched around Luanda between the advancing CIA/FAZ supported FNLA in the North and the South African 'Zulu' Column and UNITA in the South, however, the Soviet Union and Cuba also escalated their commitments. No doubt this was at least in part due to the growing clamour amongst African Heads of State against South Africa's intervention. Again accounts vary on their emphasis of Soviet logistical support depending on the sources used, but that autumn Cuba was engaged in a massive military escalation in an effort to stave off an MPLA collapse ahead of the November 11th deadline.³⁹⁹ Having already provided military instructors from Congo Brazzaville, Cuba had increased its military assistance from July 1975 and by November Cuban soldiers began an active role in the fighting with an estimated twelve thousand troops ferried from Cuba to Africa between November 1975 and January 1976.⁴⁰⁰ Neither the CIA nor its Congolese or South African allies were able to match this escalation, thus fulfilling the predictions of Nathaniel Davis and the doubters of the Africa Bureau, albeit with a Cuban twist.

The FNLA was routed at the battle of Quifangondo north of Luanda on November 11th and the Cuban forces could turn their attention on South Africa and UNITA to the South. Two decisive battles south of the Cuanza River that December essentially sealed Cuban/MPLA victory with Pretoria withdrawing its troops. China abandoned its military assistance of the FNLA that December in response to its increasingly public de facto collaboration with South Africa. A belated effort to forestall defeat by the familiar recourse to the use of mercenaries was also attempted by Mobutu without any tangible results.⁴⁰¹ Thus Neto's victory was

³⁹⁸ Gleijeses muses over the likely cooperation between the CIA and South Africa's BOSS intelligence services due to the striking congruence in timing of their respective covert operations. *Conflicting Missions* p. 297

³⁹⁹ Westad describes this debate based on varying use of Soviet, Cuban, Western and South African sources. *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge Uni Press, 2005) p. 235

⁴⁰⁰ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions* p. 259; Westad, *Global Cold War* p. 236

⁴⁰¹ According to information given by unnamed African specialists in the Belgian Ministry for Foreign Affairs to the US embassy in Brussels, Mobutu had hired some 100 British mercenaries who were transiting through Brussels for Kinshasa. While Mobutu was clearly funded by the US, this was

complete by spring of the following year with Roberto returning to Zairian exile in February and Savimbi withdrawing to the bush territories of south eastern Angola with some two thousand guerrillas. A post facto American diplomatic effort to forestall recognition of the MPLA's Peoples Republic of Angola through Mobutu at the Organisation of African Unity came to nothing with a majority of its members, and even France, granting official recognition to Neto's government by February 1976.⁴⁰² This then was the ignoble conclusion of what had been an all too predictable defeat of Kissinger's Angola policy.

In 1975, then, Mobutu had engineered a diplomatic crisis with exceptional timing to ensure his position as the centrepiece of American regional designs. The rumblings from Kinshasa that followed no doubt echoed Kissinger's long-standing desire for a regional ally to shoulder much of the burden of any emerging American strategy. Mobutu's manoeuvrings thus pushed on open doors in Washington. Nevertheless, the Congolese leader clearly influenced the aggressively interventionist direction taken with his own military forays into Angola and by presenting his Congo as the natural bulwark to control events on the ground when partnered with covert American aid. For all his posturing and chest beating, however, the Kinshasa ally was of little use in advancing US goals in Angola. Just as various dissenters in the Africa Bureau and the American Kinshasa embassy had warned, the predictable outcome of a strategy reliant on successful cooperation with Mobutu was an overwhelming defeat. The United States could not match the Soviet-Cuban commitments and, of the various Angolan independence movements, the MPLA proved the most reliable force on the ground. Furthermore, the bankrupt Congo with its rabble of undisciplined forces would prove a weak and unreliable partner. Thus, the Angola strategy conceived in an all too cosy breakfast meeting between Ambassador Vance and Mobutu both demonstrated the limits of the US-Congo alliance and, for the first time, saw this relationship have a tangible adverse impact on immediate American interests. It remains to be seen how Washington would react to the failure of its carefully nurtured ally in this first regional test.

apparently done without prior American knowledge. It provoked no reaction from the State Department; 1st February 1976, Intelligence Summary: 'Will Mercenaries Defend Zairian Border', 1st February 1976; Intelligence Chronological Fils, Dave Van Atta Papers, 1975-78, Box 11, GFL

⁴⁰² Schaufele, Kinshasa to the Secretary of State & Mulcahy, 'Angola: Meeting with Mobutu', 27th December 1975; Presidential Country Files for Africa, 1974-77, Box 7, NSA, GFL

Ambassador Kenneth Rush, Paris to Secretary of State, 'France Plans to Recognise MPLA', 16th February 1976; Presidential Country Files for Europe and Canada, Box 5, NSA, GFL

The Hollow Echoes of Defeat

Following the Angola debacle one might have expected a self-critical wringing of hands and complete overhaul of a defunct US policy towards the region by a dejected Ford administration. Perhaps the thought of being outflanked by Mobutu was too much to bear or the contemplation of such a personal failure was simply incompatible with his own sense of infallibility, but the Secretary of State proposed a very different line. From the Congressional hearings in the immediate aftermath, in his memoirs and into the present; Kissinger has consistently argued that the United States was necessarily reacting to counter a Soviet-Cuban escalation in Angola and that its covert operation was proving effective until a lily-livered Congress withdrew funding and put a premature end to an initially successful operation with the Tunney Amendment.⁴⁰³ On both counts this is a rewriting of history that distorts the facts. Aside from a complete abdication of personal responsibility, this smokescreen of disinformation also entailed problematic and immediate side effects for American policy towards Congo. If failure lay with Congress, and not in the very essence of a flawed strategy conceived under the influence and executed in partnership with a problematic ally, then a fundamental reassessment of the US-Congo relationship was unnecessary. This was clearly the Kissinger line. The following pages will consider the impact of this reasoning on the US-Congo policy in the wake of Angola. Ultimately, despite the overwhelming defeat in Angola that clearly underscored the shortcomings of its Congo alliance, the United States would remain steadfast in its uncritical endorsement and support of Mobutu. At the heart of this lay the remarkably familiar reasoning consistently upheld by successive Washington administrations that a collapse of the Mobutu regime would constitute an untenable blow to American credibility in the third world.

With regards to the first claim over the origins of the crisis, both the Soviet Union and the United States had been involved with the respective Angolan independence movements from the early sixties. Both gradually escalated their commitments throughout 1974-75, the Soviet Union through increased military assistance while America offered some funding through the CIA and, of course, indirectly supported Mobutu's forays. Furthermore, the previous section has shown that Kissinger, while certainly concerned over the role of the Soviet Union in Angola, was reacting more to the ineffectiveness of the Mobutu sponsored FNLA-FAZ operations in Angola

⁴⁰³ Formalized in the Clark amendment the following June; Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* p. 832

than any concrete Soviet escalation in the summer of 1975. Indeed, large scale Cuban troop involvement only followed the combined CIA and BOSS covert operations launched from July 1975. As such and until further documents to the contrary are declassified, perhaps the fairest conclusion over the origins of superpower involvement is offered by another administration insider. Nathaniel Davis, who resigned over the direction Kissinger was taking in Angola in September 1975, stated in a 1978 Foreign Affairs article, 'So the answer seems to be that the escalations mutually produced counter-escalations... None of the major actors entered the drama of 1975 unencumbered by the baggage of the past. Nobody can make a very good claim to have been uninvolved until provoked.'⁴⁰⁴ Furthermore, Kissinger was clearly aware of the mutual nature of the superpower escalation and the belated arrival of active fighting forces from Cuba and his belated justification for the failed American operations in Angola constituted a deliberate retelling of the facts.

Similarly, the historical record does not support the Secretary's explanation for the ultimate failure of IAFEATURE and American efforts to control events in Angola. To suggest that Congress withdrawing the necessary funding foiled an otherwise successful policy ignores the reality that the respective FNLA/FAZ and SADF-UNITA drives for Luanda had been militarily defeated by the Cuban-MPLA alliance even before the Tunney Amendment of December 20th could have any effect on the outcome of the Angolan crisis. Furthermore, Kissinger's interpretation conveniently forgets the repeated warnings he received from within his own ranks over the dangers of a covert foray into Angola, which would ultimately be unable to match the Soviet-Cuban commitment, and the pitfalls of a tactical alliance with Mobutu. Nathaniel Davis' adamant opposition has been considered and the Kinshasa embassy had also made its concerns over a covert operation that relied in large part on a cooperative Mobutu abundantly clear and as late as October 1975 was urging the Secretary of State to reconsider his approach.⁴⁰⁵ When these very accurate predictions were ultimately borne out by events, Kissinger's effort to shift the responsibility for failure to the Congressional withdrawal of funds appears particularly cynical. Time and again the Secretary had ignored the recommendations of his Africa Department and those with no doubt greater regional experience and expertise to force his own foreign policy vision. More than

⁴⁰⁴ Nathaniel Davis, 'The Angola Decision of 1975: A Personal Memoir', *Foreign Affairs* (Fall 1978) p. 123

⁴⁰⁵ Walker, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Zaire Economic Situation/Angolan War', 10th September 1975; 'Mobutu's Expectations', 12th September 1975; 'Policy Demarche to Mobutu', 13th September; 'The US, Zaire and Angola', 11th October 1975; all in Country Files for Africa, 1974-77, Box 7, NSA, GFL

this, however, it was the Secretary's obstinate refusal to reassess the American relationship with Congo that ensured the United States would once more jump to Mobutu's rescue in the aftermath of his defeat in Angola. Not only did the Kissinger line distort the shortcomings of his Angola strategy, then, but it also had a profoundly negative impact on future policies towards the region and Congo in particular.

Before examining the exact nature of Washington's developing relationship with Congo in the aftermath of Angola, however, a brief résumé of America's chief ally's performance in this first regional test should be considered. Washington presumably hoped for a useful local proxy to supply more detailed and accurate intelligence on the developing situation on the ground, diplomatic support in the various regional forums and, when necessary, an effective and coordinated military role in the conflict itself. On all these counts Mobutu fell far short of playing a useful and productive role in American designs. John Stockwell's account laments the CIA's limited access to intelligence both on the exact nature of the Angolan independence movements and the actual unfolding situation on the ground throughout Angola.⁴⁰⁶ Unfortunately, despite Mobutu's longstanding relationship with Roberto and the FNLA, Washington's Kinshasa contacts were of little use in alleviating this information deficit. Despite facilitating various meetings between Washington officials and Roberto, and later Savimbi, ultimately Mobutu only reinforced the inflated picture of the movements' relative military strength in all too transparent efforts to garner support from the United States. Beyond this, the record shows little useful intelligence passing from Kinshasa to Washington. Much rather, Mobutu remained consistent in stressing the general Soviet/Cuban threat behind any event in Angola rather than offering accurate details of the conflict, no doubt hoping to capitalise on Washington's renewed interest in the area in terms of a broader Cold War struggle.⁴⁰⁷

With regards to Congo's military capabilities, despite years of American assistance, the poor showing of the FAZ has been mentioned.⁴⁰⁸ Even Mobutu's elite commando units proved capable of little more than terrorising the population of northern Angola but crumpled as soon as they met any properly armed

⁴⁰⁶ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies* pp. 90-127

⁴⁰⁷ Various meetings between Vance and Mobutu, July 1975; Presidential Country Files for Africa, 1974-77, Box 7, NSA, GFL

⁴⁰⁸ Ambassador Walter L. Cutler, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Angola and Zairian Security', 19th June 1976; Presidential Country Files for Africa, 1974-77, Box 7, NSA, GFL

resistance.⁴⁰⁹ The clearest example, however, that Kinshasa was very much pursuing its own agenda can be found in Congo's role as a distributor for American military supplies to the Angolan independence movements. By late 1975 it was becoming increasingly evident that Mobutu was retaining arms for his own purposes rather than passing them to their intended target. Holden Roberto himself lamented this problem in a meeting with Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Mulcahy and an intelligence memorandum for Brent Scowcroft noted in January 1976 that, 'Zaire is becoming a highly questionable conduit.'⁴¹⁰ As such, both in terms of offering useful intelligence and in the projection of direct military power, America's Congolese ally proved a weak and unreliable reed and at times even hindered immediate American objectives. Indeed, this was a further illustration that Mobutu's personal aims were by no means congruent with the American Cold War agenda.

On the diplomatic stage, the picture is a little more blurred. As the effort to defeat the MPLA and its backers floundered militarily, by the end of 1975 Washington somewhat belatedly hoped to isolate the independence movement politically through its allies at the OAU with calls for a cessation of outside intervention. Thus Schaufele and Mulcahy's diplomatic missions to Kinshasa sought to harness Mobutu into organising a coalition of 'moderate' African states to forestall recognition of the MPLA government in Luanda. For a leader keen to stress his credentials as a pivotal African statesman such calls were no doubt enthusiastically received and Mobutu certainly made the right noises both at the OAU and the UN. Considerable chest beating from Kinshasa over the president's skilful diplomacy in organising a loose coalition against the MPLA ahead of the OAU summit amounted to very little and Mobutu quietly dropped this initiative, no doubt wary of championing a futile cause. By late December Secretary Schaufele reported, 'I am convinced that, while we can continue to count on Zaire in the military sphere, we cannot look to Mobutu to provide the major impetus for effectively organizing political and diplomatic efforts among friendly African states

⁴⁰⁹ The British Embassy in Kinshasa commented that even the much-vaunted North Korean trained 'Kamanyola Division' had turned out to be 'an untrained rabble'. Ambassador R.J. Stratton, Kinshasa, 'Zaire Annual Review for 1975', 2nd January 1975; FCO 31/2014: Annual Review for Zaire for 1975, Kew

⁴¹⁰ Walker, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Mulcahy Meeting with Holden Roberto', 28th November 1975; Presidential Country Files for Africa, 1974-77, Box 7, NSA, GFL; NSC Staffer Clinton E. Granger, 'Memorandum for Brent Scowcroft: Overt Funding for Angola', 16th January 1976; Presidential Country Files for Africa, 1974-77, Box 1, NSA, GFL

prior to or during the OAU meetings.⁴¹¹ To be sure, the failure of this initiative was due more to its belated nature no longer reflecting the political realities in Angola than any visible diplomatic shortcomings on Mobutu's part. Moreover, despite the initiative's failure, Kissinger certainly placed some value on a vociferous regional ally touting the Washington line and boosting American third world credentials, albeit in a flawed and limited way.

Ultimately, the reasons for the failure of Kissinger's Angola policies were manifold; not least the lack of appetite for military escalation from the American public, the increasingly active Cuban and Soviet role in the conflict and the relative superiority of the MPLA leadership to its competitors all contributed to this eventual outcome. The point is that these dangers were clearly apparent even before Washington escalated its stakes in Angola in the summer of 1975 but Kissinger had hoped to offset these disadvantages by relying on his Congolese ally. Just as the Africa bureau in Washington and the embassy in Kinshasa had warned, this proved to be a gross miscalculation and overestimation of Mobutu's usefulness. Nor could Washington hope for much more from its bankrupt African protégé in the foreseeable future.

The Cuban-Soviet assisted success of the MPLA cast independence movements throughout Africa in a new light as White House options paper on southern Africa in the aftermath of Angola noted, 'The massive introduction of Soviet equipment and Cuban combat forces into Angola has altered the nature of the region's struggles for national liberation.'⁴¹² Thus, Washington viewed subsequent developments in Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia), Namibia and apartheid South Africa with considerable trepidation. That Mobutu would have little influence in these developments was clear from the outset, however. Teetering as it was on the edge of bankruptcy, Congo's own domestic woes precluded it from playing a more active role in the region. As Washington sought to steer Zimbabwe towards a negotiated political settlement, Secretary Schauffele noted that Congo's economic dependence on its neighbour was such that, 'We can expect support but not much of a contribution from Mobutu.'⁴¹³ Similarly, Congo's president's all too cosy relationship with the apartheid South African government since the very

⁴¹¹ Schauffele, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Angola: Meeting with Mobutu', 27th December 1975; Presidential Country Files for Africa, 1974-77, Box 7, NSA, GFL

⁴¹² Springsteen, Memorandum for Scowcroft, 11th March 1976; Institutional Files- NSSM 241: United States Policy in Southern Africa, Box 44, NSC, GFL

⁴¹³ Katangan copper production was dependent on Zimbabwean coal and corn imports were increasingly supplementing the Congolese food supply. Schauffele, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Conversation with Mobutu', 13th July 1976; Presidential Country Files for Africa, 1974-77, Box 7, NSA, GFL

beginning of his rule had once more come under scrutiny with his forces fighting as de facto allies with the SADF in Angola. As a result, he lacked both interest and credibility on this issue. In other words, beyond its miserable showing as an ally in Angola, the United States could not hope for a much more from its Congo relationship looking forward to the challenges facing Washington in Africa either.

Actively involved in its creation and having propped up the Mobutu regime for the past decade, then, drawing up a balance sheet in 1976 demonstrates that the United States had gained few tangible benefits from its considerable efforts in Congo. More importantly still, no change was in sight in this one-way relationship as American officials noted that Mobutu's Congo could not be expected to play a useful role in the African challenges facing Washington in Angola's aftermath. At the same time, Congo's domestic problems abounded and Mobutu's leadership stood on increasingly tenuous ground. Just as the American embassy in Kinshasa had warned the previous year, Mobutu had used the Angolan conflict as a distraction from Congo's economic troubles and the result was a predictably deepening economic crisis matched by ever increasing disillusionment with the Kinshasa regime amongst the population at large.

Thus, the after tremors of the Kissinger-Mobutu Angola adventure were now profoundly impacting the Congolese population and even appeared to threaten the Kinshasa regime. A detailed analytical paper on Congo passed to Brent Scowcroft that August warned, 'Zaire's political base has contracted to include at the core only military and civilian bureaucracies; the disaffection of parts of these bureaucracies and the urban and mining workers are serious threats.'⁴¹⁴ Falling copper prices coupled with Mobutu's unpopular and expensive Angola foray meant that by 1976 the country's mismanagement was having a severe impact on many sections of the population. Beyond the economic woes of food shortages, high prices and reduced purchasing power of salaries; the analytical paper noted that the rotten administration was increasingly unable to offer even basic services with the severely diminished ability of hospitals to care for the sick and 'the reduction of public schools to "animation centres" for Mobutu.'⁴¹⁵ As such, while the largess and exorbitant lifestyles of the narrow elite was galling, the growing spread of diseases such as Kwashiorkor (an acute form of childhood protein deficiency and malnutrition) illustrated the lot of the frustrated masses. At the same time, Mobutu's ability to alleviate dissent through his long trusted means of patronage

⁴¹⁴ Arthur H. House, 'Memorandum for Brent Scowcroft: Analytical Paper on Zaire', 30th August 1976; Presidential Country Files for Africa, 1974-77, Box 7, NSA, GFL

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

was increasingly hamstrung and growing problems of poor morale and indiscipline could be noted in the military. Thus, despite Mobutu's continued emphasis on external communist aggression, an interagency intelligence report concluded that, 'Perhaps the strongest potential threat to Mobutu emanates from within Zaire rather than from across its borders.'⁴¹⁶ In sum then, by 1976 Washington was faced with a largely moribund ally in Congo that lacked both legitimacy at home and the ability to play a useful role in the region beyond meagre expressions of loyalty to the American line in the diplomatic sphere. In view of such limited prospects for a mutually beneficial partnership, the question remains how the Ford administration would respond to these circumstances?

By March 1976, Mobutu buckled and finally agreed to a long overdue and much needed IMF reform package. On the one hand, this was touted by Kissinger in Washington as a clear signal of the leader's desire to move his country in the right direction. On the other hand, the details of how Mobutu would abide by and implement unpalatable austerity measures (including a forty-two per cent devaluation of the Zaire) and uphold Congo's commitments remained to be seen. No doubt American policy and guidance were crucial to Mobutu's calculations, as Charles W. Robinson (the Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs) noted,

'Economic distress-- stemming from a combination of depressed copper prices, inflated costs of imports, heavy foreign debts accumulated in a binge of spending, and nationalistic-socialistic excesses—combines with political crisis to make Mobutu look to the industrial West for salvation... In this atmosphere, we have a better chance than we ever have had or may again have to move Zaire along the way toward fulfilling its great promise.'⁴¹⁷

To what extent Washington would in fact seize this moment soon became evident.

Once again the Secretary of State dominated policy and ensured that the United States would remain steadfast in its uncritical support of the Mobutu regime. This line was underscored by string of diplomatic visits to Kinshasa as further economic and military aid packages were hammered out and Washington, under Kissinger's direction, took the lead in organising the international community's bailout of Congo's debt crisis. Perhaps the clearest public indication that Mobutu's Congo remained very much within the public fold was the string of diplomatic missions between Washington and Kinshasa. Thus both Mulcahy and Schaufele made

⁴¹⁶ Bush to Kissinger: Interagency Intelligence Memorandum: 'The Military Threat to Zaire', 25th May 1976; FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume E-6

⁴¹⁷ Robinson, Memorandum for the Secretary: 'Expanded US Assistance to Zaire', 6th March 1976; FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume E-6

repeated visits to Mobutu between December 1975 and the summer of 1976, as has been noted. Nor was the Pentagon to be out done by the State Department, as General Rockwell led another military mission to Kinshasa and Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld also followed suit in June 1976. Most notably, however, President Ford received Congo's Foreign Minister Nguza Karl-I-Bond in Washington that February in a largely symbolic gesture of support while Secretary Kissinger offered Mobutu further assurances in a personal stopover in Kinshasa during his much-vaunted Africa trip in April. More than empty gestures, this political activity translated into considerable assistance for Congo. Direct economic and military aid was significantly increased as the State Department proposed a 184 million dollar bilateral aid program for the two fiscal years 1976-77⁴¹⁸ and additional Security Supporting Assistance of 44.5 million dollars for 1977 was sought following General Rockwell's report.⁴¹⁹

Concerned that this bilateral effort would prove insufficient, the United States also exerted considerable pressure on the IMF and the World Bank (IBRD) to reengage Congo. The result was 150 million dollar loan from the former and the reviving the international Consultative Group for (aid to) Zaire under the latter.⁴²⁰ In addition to cajoling the major development organisations, Washington also pressured its European allies directly into further assistance and the coordinated management of Congo's debt crisis.⁴²¹ In the first half of 1976, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research noted that the Kinshasa regime had failed to meet some 150 million dollars in debt repayment obligations.⁴²² The renegotiation of this debt on a short-term basis was achieved at the Paris Club in June but, as Washington was painfully aware, debt service payments looked to remain at some thirty per cent of gross domestic product for the best part of the next decade.⁴²³ For this very reason the American lead in this process was no doubt as important to Mobutu as it was to the smaller donor countries in Europe. Even with all of the above measures, whether such a cash-strapped economy could be revived remained doubtful and depended very much upon stringent administrative

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ NSSM 241: United States Policy in Selected Areas of Sub-Saharan Africa: Summary Overview, 19th August 1976; Institutional Files, NSSM 241: United States Policy in Southern Africa, Box 44, NSC, GFL

⁴²⁰ Robinson to Kissinger, 'Expanded US Assistance to Zaire', 6th March 1976; FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume E-6

⁴²¹ Turner, USMISSION OECD Paris to Robinson, 'Meeting with Political Director Davignon of Belgian Foreign Ministry to Discuss Aid to Zaire', 12th March 1976; Presidential Country Files for Europe and Canada, Box 5, NSA, GFL

⁴²² INR, 'Zaire: A Poor Prognosis', 28th December 1976; FRUS, Volume E-6

⁴²³ Ibid.

reforms and the resurrection of various moribund sectors, in particular agriculture and transport, to make the country less dependent on expensive food imports.

From the very outset, however, this American orchestrated effort was riddled with problems. First of all, Mobutu was a notoriously unreliable and evasive partner for such development schemes. Successive administrations in Washington had noted his brash attitude towards economic matters, promising reforms while pursuing a much more self-serving line. This round would prove no exception and the analytical paper cited earlier made precisely this point,

‘Mobutu is a man who dislikes economics, postpones economic decisions as long as he can, and resists adjusting to economic reality... Mobutu has become fabulously wealthy; estimates run over 100 million dollars in personal wealth with chateaus in Europe and most of the other trappings. Mobutu would have to do something extraordinary before the Zairian people would believe that the extravagance symbolized by his Marble Palace, helicopters, the expensive automobiles, and his well supported entourage... Mobutu has exasperated those who try to discuss economic management and reform; the results are usually use of the right words without action to back them up... A Spartan conversion would be popular, if difficult. Mobutu may well prefer to go the route on champagne.’⁴²⁴

As a result, if Congo was to be steered into a more sustainable direction then the United States would have to take a decisive lead.

While the diagnosis of the State Department, and Under Secretary Charles Robinson in particular, appeared accurate, the necessary impetus to ensure an about turn by the Mobutu regime was decidedly absent. An early indication of this was the pressure exerted on the American Export Import Bank for continued credit to the Inga-Shaba power line project. As has been noted in the previous chapter, inefficient prestige projects that diverted scarce capital from much needed development and infrastructure programs had plagued Mobutu’s economic management throughout the 1970s. Rather than abandon such projects to failure, Washington preferred to help the leader stumble along in this venture in an apparent effort to cushion the inevitable blows to his credibility as the Bureau of Intelligence and Research pointed out, ‘Political considerations are also behind the government’s insistence on continuing the prestige projects, some of which are so far along that cancelling them would be viewed as an admission of the gravity of

⁴²⁴ Arthur H. House, Memorandum for Scowcroft: Analytical Paper on Zaire, 30th August 1976; Presidential Country Files for Africa, Box 7, NSA, GFL

the economic situation.’⁴²⁵ In other words, from the outset of its post-Angola drive to strengthen Congo then, Washington was already signalling a considerable degree of compromise to accommodate Mobutu’s past excesses.

The greatest obstacle to more decisive pressure for reform on Mobutu, however, was Kissinger’s continued personal dominance over US-Congolese relations. Both to his own staff and in various meetings with the president, the Secretary of State aggressively pursued additional assistance to Congo. In this way, minutes of a cabinet meeting emphasised his personal stake in securing aid for Mobutu and his central role in forming a posse of helpers from Europe in a cabinet meeting that June,

‘But can I, by the time I get back, get a package of what is needed so that we know what we are doing...I don’t want to worry about whether it’s bureaucratically proper. Then you do it. When I was there I told Mobutu we would do this... I think we can get Belgian support. I think we can get British support. It takes somebody to take the initiative... But can we get a program? You’ll never get it by just calling a meeting of a group. Somebody has to push a program and ask them for specific contributions.’⁴²⁶

The Secretary of State’s pulling the strings of the unfolding Congo policy entailed two important side effects. First of all, it ensured that a considerable emphasis would remain on Congo’s perceived security needs. More significant, however, was Kissinger’s lack of emphasis on the much-needed political overhaul and reform of the Mobutu regime.

In line with Kissinger’s fixation on security and in an about turn from its earlier mission, the second Military Technical Advisory Team (MTAT II) report under General Rockwell in June 1976 was now adamant over the urgent need for a massive increase in military assistance to Congo. To Rockwell events in Angola posed, ‘a well-defined potential threat which will mature in one to three years...’ for Congo as he felt that, ‘the Soviets have a grand design to control Southern Africa.’ As a result, he stressed the strategic importance of fostering, ‘an economically viable Zaire possessing a credible military deterrent...’ that could, ‘... assist markedly in countering Soviet efforts in that part of the world.’ All this only served to highlight the dangers for Congo and American interests there as Rockwell deemed it,

‘entirely plausible... for the Soviets to use surrogates (Angolans and ex-Katangese gendarmes) armed with sophisticated weapons already in Angola to

⁴²⁵ Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, ‘Zaire: A Poor Prognosis’, 28th December 1976; FRUS, Volume E-6

⁴²⁶ Minutes of Staff Meeting, 17th June 1976; FRUS, Volume E-6

insure the demise of the pro-Western regime in Zaire, replacing it with a pro-Soviet revolutionary movement.’⁴²⁷

This was not only a complete shift from the earlier MTAT report that predated the Angolan defeat, recommending much more limited assistance, but it also flew in the face of the Interagency Report on Congo’s security that identified the primary threat to Mobutu as internal instability rather than any external peril (as has been noted earlier).

Perhaps this demonstrates the siege mentality felt in certain quarters in Washington following Angola. It is certainly indicative of Washington’s failure to draw from the obvious lessons of this earlier defeat. The fact that Mobutu’s Congo had proved a paper tiger during this first regional test was at least in part due to the intransigence of his self-serving regime that relied more on its armed forces, supported and equipped by the United States, than on effective governing. The result was a bankrupt and crippled country that was a far cry from the ‘deterrent’ envisioned by Rockwell. Rather than addressing these issues, however, the MTAT II report called for some 465 million dollars worth of military assistance over the next five years; almost quadrupling previous estimates. In other words, without the necessary reforms, such support would offer little more than temporary relief to the floundering and unpopular Mobutu government. Newly arrived ambassador Walter L. Cutler, a former member of Washington’s Congo Working Group, noted precisely this frustration with American policy from Kinshasa insiders, ‘We have received a trickle of critical comments (primarily from the intellectual community) to the effect that US support for Mobutu amounts to propping up a nearly defunct regime.’⁴²⁸ As such, any effort that fell short of a stringent and binding commitment for reform in Kinshasa simply condemned Congo’s population to further hardship without offering the prospect of a stable and dependable ally to Washington. Unfortunately, under Secretary Kissinger’s lead such pressure for reform remained notably absent.

Linked to Kissinger’s refusal to draw critical conclusions from his failed Angola strategy was his blinkered fixation on Mobutu’s security needs over the much-needed political and economic reform. Ahead of the Angola escalation the Secretary of State had resisted calls for conditional aid to Congo to be tied to IMF reforms. While Kissinger was now keen to stress Mobutu’s acceptance of the IMF reforms as

⁴²⁷ General James M. Rockwell, US Military Technical Advisory Team II for Republic of Zaire, Memorandum for the Secretary of Defence and Secretary of State: Military Technical Advisory Team Report (MTAT), 17th June 1976; FRUS, Volume E-6

⁴²⁸ Cutler, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, ‘The Mood in Zaire’, 26th April 1976; FRUS, Volume E-6

an indication of the leader's repentant attitude in Washington, he remained characteristically mute on this subject in his personal meetings with Congo's president that April. On the one hand, in these meetings the Secretary seemed taken in with Mobutu's security concerns, 'Everywhere he looks he sees red or crazy regimes—Angola, Mozambique, Central African Republic, Congo/Brazzaville, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Sudan, Uganda, Libya.' More than this, however, in another breakfast meeting apparently favoured by the Kinshasa despot, Kissinger indulged Mobutu's line that no doubt reflected his own version of the Angola debacle berating the 'retired Protestant missionaries who constitute our Africa bureau' and who 'don't believe in military aid'.⁴²⁹ Indeed, in the preceding talks aboard the presidential yacht Kissinger had confided to Mobutu,

'I must manoeuvre to get the Soviet Union to split Africa and I think I am making progress. That is my public position. But my private position is that without strength, there is no foreign policy. You know very well that if we had had a foreign policy, we would have won in Angola. If we had done more for Savimbi, there would have been a victory in Angola, but we must not permit this to happen again... We will strengthen Zaire, which is a friend of the US, just as we have made Egypt stronger. Two and one-half years ago when I began my policy, Egypt was not receiving one cent from the US. Today, it receives one billion in direct aid and 900 million in indirect aid.'⁴³⁰

This brazen rewriting of history and attributing the failure in Angola to insufficient aid was no doubt music to Mobutu's ears. Kissinger went on to promise both increased direct economic and military assistance as well as assurances of raising support from other donor countries and multilateral aid organisations. At no point did he mention Mobutu's past transgressions nor did the Secretary of State at any stage point to the need for administrative reform or economic restraint from his ally. In other words, Kissinger offered his old partner in Kinshasa a seemingly unqualified and unconditional offer of assistance. Coming as it did within a month of Mobutu's reluctant acquiescence to the IMF reforms, this did not bode well for the effective implementation of such a program.

⁴²⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Participants: Lt. General Mobutu Sese Seko, President of Zaire; Nguza Karl-i-Bond, State Commissioner for Foreign Affairs; Bofassa Wambeo Nkoso, State Commissioner for Finances; Henry Kissinger, Secretary of State; William Schauffele, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs; Ambassador Walter Cutler; President's Palace, Kinshasa, 30th April 1976; FRUS, Volume E-6

⁴³⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, Secretary's Meeting with President Mobutu aboard his Yacht, 28th April 1976; FRUS, Volume E-6

Whether viewed through a hardnosed realist lens or from a more liberal developmentalist perspective, the course taken by Kissinger in Kinshasa can only be described as extremely short sighted. That Congo was unable to function as a strong and stable counterpoint to regional instability or Soviet subversion had been amply demonstrated in Angola. At the same time, a decade of Mobutu's rule of largess and corruption had ruined the economy of a potentially prosperous country and was now severely impacting the lives of ordinary Congolese. The IMF, World Bank and even Undersecretary Roberts had all pointed to the need for stringent austerity measures and economic reform if Mobutu was to reverse Congo's fortunes and, by extension, play a useful role in future American designs. That Mobutu was unlikely to cooperate by his own volition and preferred to 'go the route on champagne' had also been amply stressed. Nevertheless, in his private talks with the Congolese leader Kissinger appeared to be signalling that the United States would not permit its allies to fall with an unconditional promise of support.

The results were predictable. By August the previously cited analytical paper on Congo noted, 'The IMF has extended credit on terms which Zaire evidently cannot meet and based on reforms not being made.'⁴³¹ By the end of the year the Bureau of Intelligence and research issued a gloomy warning,

'The short-term outlook for Zaire is for continued balance of payments problems, little if any economic growth, the need for austerity measures, and increased popular discontent. For the outlook to improve in the longer run, several fundamental problems that have plagued the economy will have to be resolved... If, however, the international financial community continues to make loans without strict conditions, or sufficient bilateral or international aid funds become available, Zaire will be able to muddle through the present financial crisis without changing, even so far as it can, the reasons for deficits in its balance of payments.'⁴³²

In precisely this way, Henry Kissinger ignored the moment of opportunity identified by Undersecretary Roberts to revive the Kinshasa regime.

The reasons for the Secretary's refusal to heed the warnings even of his own economic advisers are a little baffling at first glance. To be sure, many other corners of the administration, not least the Kinshasa embassy under Cutler, called for increased economic and military assistance to maintain good relations with the

⁴³¹ Arthur H. House, Memorandum for Brent Scowcroft: 'Analytical Paper on Zaire', 30th August 1976; Presidential Country Files for Africa, Box 7, NSA, GFL

⁴³² Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, 'Zaire: A Poor Prognosis', 28th December 1976; FRUS, Volume E-6

faltering ally. It was the cavalier no-strings-attached manner in which Kissinger offered US aid that is so surprising. Perhaps Kissinger simply did not see the relevance of a functioning economic system provided Congo's leader had ample military muscle to back up his position both domestically and abroad. The fact that he was at pains to turn Washington's long term friend into a showcase in Africa flies in the face of such an explanation, however.⁴³³ Indeed, at the heart of this entire strategy lay the perceived need to reinforce American credibility throughout the globe, and in the third world in particular, by demonstrating that benefits of close cooperation with America. In a National Security Council meeting Kissinger proclaimed, 'Mr. President, in the Congo, Zaire, we won the war we lost in Angola. If Zaire goes, every African state will draw the conclusion that the Soviet Union (which they don't like all that much) is the wave of the future.'⁴³⁴ From this perspective, Mobutu's success was intimately tied to American credibility throughout the region. At the same time, however, a self-conscious Kissinger, reassuring and apologetic over perceived past American weakness in the region, apparently felt unable to pressure his Congolese ally when it came to Mobutu's own much needed domestic reforms. Ultimately then, despite the extremely limited rewards from its ten year support of Congo, a myopic refusal to grasp the lessons of the Angola debacle and a crisis of confidence over perceived American credibility in the area combined to ensure that no progress would be made in the Washington-Kinshasa relationship. Congo's kleptocratic regime could continue to muddle along on the edge of bankruptcy with an apparently unconditional guarantee from its American patron.

By 1975, Mobutu had run his country into economic ruin and the prospects of his regime looked increasingly questionable. With a series of crass political ploys he manoeuvred his Congo back into the American fold and became the lynchpin of Washington's Angola intervention under Secretary Kissinger's direction, and despite the warnings of the State Department's Africa Bureau and the its Kinshasa embassy. The conflict in Angola, in turn, clearly indicated the shortcomings of a strategy focused around Washington's Congo ally and illustrated the limited rewards of its decade long support of the Mobutu regime. Rather than reassessing past failings and looking to move this relationship in a more positive direction, however, the Secretary of State sought to avert responsibility for the humiliating defeat in Angola by pointing to an intransigent Congress withdrawing support for

⁴³³ Memorandum of Conversation: President Ford, Secretary Kissinger, Brent Scowcroft; 10th May 1976; Memoranda of Conversations-1973-77, Box 19, NSA, GFL

⁴³⁴ NSC Meeting, 'Kissinger's Africa Trip', 11th May 1976; NSC Meetings File, Box 2, NSA, GFL

an otherwise effective strategy. Such a cynical distortion of the facts ensured that a much needed reassessment and overhaul of the Washington-Kinshasa relationship was avoided. Despite the various multilateral agencies and Kissinger's own economic advisers' insistence that Congo was in dire need for economic and administrative reform, the Secretary of State ensured that Washington would once more offer unconditional support to Mobutu and travelled to Kinshasa to make personal assurances to this effect. The predictable result was continued economic malaise in Congo as its government remained evasive on the promised reforms.

Conclusion

Defeat in Angola was the culmination of a decade-long reliance of successive Washington administrations on President Mobutu to uphold American interests in the region. The reluctant foreign policy of Lyndon Johnson resisted a more meaningful identification with Africa's independence struggles in the mid 1960s. In Congo this translated into a series of short-term manipulations that fostered the emergence of Colonel Mobutu to the fore of Congolese politics and presented a seemingly workable solution to the turmoil that plagued the country following its independence. At the same time, this both elevated the United States to a position of dominant influence with the Kinshasa government while increasingly tying America to a regime with dubious credentials. For all his apparent foreign policy expertise, this emphasis on the American-Mobutu alliance in place of any more fundamental African engagement was swallowed whole and pushed by Kissinger with his arrival in Washington during the Nixon years. As such, it was during the Nixon years that this reliance on Mobutu personally was formalised into a more coherent strategy. In accordance with the Nixon Doctrine, the Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy team looked to regional allies to carry the burden of American global Cold War designs. Mobutu, of course, readily pandered to the geostrategic preoccupations of his principal ally and in return received an unfettered presidential endorsement at the outset of the 1970s. Despite the increasingly obvious signs that the Kinshasa despot was creating an unsustainable personal fiefdom ruled through a mixture of repression and patronage, the Nixon-Kissinger willingness to rely narrowly on Mobutu personally as a loyal bulwark against communist subversion in the region considerably aided and abetted his mounting corrupt largess.

The complete undoing of this line, not only for the neglected Congolese masses but also for immediate American interests, finally came during the Ford years when the muscle flexed by the increasingly bankrupt Kinshasa ally in Angola had atrophied to the point of complete impotence. Mobutu's quite transparent manipulations of his Washington ally were nonetheless shrewd reflections of Kissinger's own desire for his regional partner to dominate the crisis unfolding in Angola. Going against the better judgment of his key Africa advisers, the Secretary of State thus responded to Mobutu's prompting to conceive an ill-fated CIA operation with Congo as the centrepiece of its support of the FNLA. As such, Mobutu had successfully directed his American partner into a growing commitment in the Angolan civil war while pursuing very much his own agenda. The fact that he was an increasingly unreliable conduit for American arms intended for the FNLA certainly suggests that his efforts in Angola were not entirely whole-hearted. Unable to either match the corresponding Soviet-Cuban escalation or trump this with his presumed Congolese ace, Kissinger thus presided over the culmination of a flawed strategy in Angola that led to the first resounding American setback in Africa during the Cold War. Equally unwilling to contemplate the flaws of his own design, however, Kissinger remained defiant in defeat and continued to hold firm to the line of unconditional support for Mobutu's defunct regime.

This inertia to redirect a clearly moribund policy is extremely hard to understand and no doubt strengthens the scepticism of conspiracy theorists that would place American private business interests at the heart of American concerns in Congo. The fact that the tangible gains were so limited relative to the considerable investments of successive Washington administrations into Congo lends itself to the line that the government machinery was acting on behalf of private corporations in search of opportunity and mining concessions. As in previous chapters, however, during this period it was the Washington administration that harnessed its business contacts to its own political ends rather than the other way round. In this way Kissinger himself met with Maurice Templesman and former CIA Chief of Mission Devlin (by now a Templesman employee), and called Standard Oil's chairman Swearingen, to ask them to postpone any decisions to mothball the exploitation of the Tenke Fugurumne concession, awarded to the Societe Miniere de Tenke Fungurume (SMTF) consortium in 1970, until after the pending OAU summit on Angola. Similarly, the Secretary of State applied pressure on World Bank President Robert McNamara to offer financing for the SMTF project. While such close cooperation between private business interests,

the World Bank and the grand strategists of government policy in Washington undoubtedly has an unsavoury tone to it, these exchanges led to little more than SMTF postponing the announcement of its decision to withdraw until 1976 at Kissinger's beckoning.⁴³⁵ Evidence of business influence on government policy, on the other hand, remains scarce.

Perhaps a more reasonable but equally intangible explanation can be found in the psychological need of successive Washington administrations to portray Congo as a success story and the fear that a collapse of its long-standing ally would deal a blow to American credibility in Africa and the Third World at large. As has been seen, in a post-mortem of IAFEATURE, Kissinger proclaimed to the NSC, 'Mr President, in the Congo, Zaire, we won the war we lost in Angola.'⁴³⁶ Time and again, the loyal ally Mobutu was vaunted as the outcome of a successful covert operation in the Third World. With the failures in Vietnam and Angola etched into the minds of policy makers, clinging to such supposed triumphs appeared all the more vital. At the same time, the potential collapse of the Mobutu regime might demonstrate the pitfalls of a close collaboration with the United States and was accordingly viewed as a threat to American credibility in the region. As such, the psychological need to cling to a success story in Washington and the desire to promote American Third World credentials were inextricably linked in the mind-set of the Kissinger-dominated administration that ensured further support with only the loosest conditions for the defunct Kinshasa despot. Unfortunately, the price of this was continued stagnation and economic hardship for the people of Congo, a further blow to America's standing in Africa and a serious setback for American Cold War aims.

Both with its encouragement of Mobutu's costly and diversionary Angola adventure and with Kissinger's willingness to give further unconditional assurances for further aid; the United States played its role in Mobutu's continued intransigence over reform, Congo's mounting debt and corresponding financial ruin, and the by now abject poverty of much of the population. Mobutu, of course, at least in part engineered his foray into Angola in response to his domestic woes. As such, the doomed Washington-Kinshasa alliance in Angola and the devastating impact on American regional standing of their resounding defeat were inextricably

⁴³⁵ Schaufele to Embassy, Kinshasa, 'Secretary's Meeting with SMTF Reps, Call to MacNamara', 25th December 1975; Mobutu was also not averse to using Maurice Templesman and Devlin as intermediaries to pass on his concerns over Angola to American officials. Hinton reported such a meeting on 7th June 1975; both in Country Files for Africa, 1974-1977, Box 7, NSA, GFL. Also, Gibbs, *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention* pp. 183-85

⁴³⁶ NSC Meeting, 'Kissinger's Africa Trip', 11th May 1976; NSC Meetings File, Box 2, NSA, GFL

linked to Congo's domestic troubles. With the recognition of the MPLA by the OAU, the communist bloc had successfully backed a legitimate and acceptable independence movement with equipment from the Soviet Union and largely black soldiers from Cuba. Washington and its Congolese ally, on the other hand, not only found themselves on the losing side but had also formed a de facto alliance with the reviled SADF and its apartheid government. Once more the United States was on the side of the reactionary forces in a continent desperate to rid itself of white minority rule in a quest for true independence and the outrage was palpable.

Most significant, at least from an American perspective however, were the consequences for the global Cold War. Westad makes the point that from the Soviet vantage Angola had been somewhat of a chance success.⁴³⁷ It was this victory that caused the communist superpower to take note and consider Africa as an arena in which real tangible gains could be achieved at limited cost. As a result, just as the US policy paper on Southern Africa (NSSM 241) noted, Angola opened the door to a renewed and more confident Soviet adventurism in Africa. Indeed, the emergence of Africa as a more active battlefield for Cold War competition was perhaps the most devastating consequence of Kissinger's reliance on Mobutu's Congo and his corresponding failure to develop an adequate response to Africa's independence movements, and the spreading turmoil in Angola in particular, in eight years in office. How the avowed idealism of Jimmy Carter would deal with this legacy that saw both a more concerted resistance and even open revolt against Mobutu's rule in Congo and an increasingly active Soviet-Cuban engagement in Africa forms the subject of the final chapter.

⁴³⁷ Westad, *Global Cold War* pp. 242-243

5

**Ambivalence and Continuity:
Jimmy Carter and Mobutu's Congo**

With the arrival of President Carter to the White House in January 1977, the Washington maverick professed a fresh approach to diplomacy 'based on fundamental values... and the use of power and influence for human purposes'.⁴³⁸ Rejecting the hard-nosed realism of the Kissinger years, the president announced a vision that would further American interests by once more making it a beacon of idealism throughout the world. Carter himself summarised these intentions in his memoirs as follows,

'I was determined to combine support for our more authoritarian allies and friends with effective promotion of human rights within their countries. By inducing them to change their repressive policies, we would be enhancing freedom and democracy, and helping to remove the reasons for revolutions that often erupt among those who suffer from persecution.'⁴³⁹

It was clear from the outset that such high-minded goals presented a dilemma between protecting immediate American interests around the world while remaining true to this principled stand. Indeed, the traditional view of Carter's foreign policy sees the tension between projecting an assertive foreign policy agenda while professing a more moralistic approach to diplomacy personified in the conflicting stances of his two key advisers, the lawyerly Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and the hawkish National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski.

In part due to the realities of the rough and tumble of international politics and in part due to the successful manoeuvrings of Brzezinski and Vance's resignation in April 1980, according to this line lofty ambitions to reshape international politics with an emphasis on fundamental values were thus gradually replaced by a more traditionally realist and muscular foreign policy by the second half of Carter's term.⁴⁴⁰ The result was the perception of an incoherent approach to international affairs remembered more for its contradictions, shortcomings in its diplomacy with the Soviet Union and weakness vis-à-vis the rival superpower than its apparent successes. As such, the White House's inability to counter Soviet-Cuban adventurism in the Horn of Africa, secure the release of American hostages in Iran or compel the Soviet Union to withdraw from Afghanistan receive greater emphasis and are more readily remembered than apparent successes such as the negotiation

⁴³⁸ Quote from a key foreign policy address given by President Carter at the University of Notre Dame, 22nd May 1977; cited in William Stueck, *'Placing Jimmy Carter's Foreign Policy'* in Gary M. Fink & Hugh Davis Graham (eds.), *The Carter Presidency: Policy Choices in the Post New Deal Era* (Uni Kansas Press, 1998) p. 247

⁴³⁹ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping the Faith: Memoirs of a President* (Uni. Of Arkansas Press, 1995) p. 142

⁴⁴⁰ Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York; Hill and Wang, 1986) p. 9

of the Panama Canal Treaty, the conclusion of a second strategic arms limitation agreement with the Soviet Union (SALT II) and the effective brokering of the Camp David Accords.⁴⁴¹

Arguably, Carter's approach to Africa gives the clearest illustration of this foreign policy ambivalence. On the one hand, continuing Kissinger's belated diplomatic initiatives, Carter won considerable acclaim amongst Africa's statesmen for his support of British efforts for a peaceful transition to majority rule in Zimbabwe, his encouragement of a United Nations resolution over Namibia and his pressure on South Africa to reform its apartheid system. As such, Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere heralded Carter's electoral victory with hopeful optimism, 'Today's elections bear even greater significance, to Tanzania and Africa, as far as concerns the liberation struggle in Southern Africa, because of the declared policies of the two candidates... America's belated interest in a solution to the racial and colonial problems in southern Africa as demonstrated by Kissinger's shuttles of April through September 1976 was basically to police, contain and finally counteract the "Soviet Threat". James Earl Carter, the Democrat presidential candidate, on the other hand, ... makes pronouncements about the liberation struggle in southern Africa, which indicate that he does not regard the struggle as one whose objective is to hand over Africa to the Soviet Union, just because Africa is a recipient of Soviet aid.'⁴⁴²

Despite this optimistic tenor, the spectre of communist subversion continued to loom in the minds of Washington policy makers as these turbulent issues appeared to offer plenty of opportunity for further Soviet-Cuban meddling. Indeed, these fears were not entirely unfounded as the Soviet Union did in fact continue to expand its presence in Africa, most notably coming to the rescue of Mengistu Haile Mariam's and the Ethiopian revolution following Somalia's invasion of the Ogaden. From September 1977 the Soviet Union provided over a billion dollars of military equipment during the following eighteen months and close to one thousand Soviet military personnel assisted on the ground in the organisation of the Ethiopian counteroffensive, once more aided by the active role of some 11,600 Cuban troops

⁴⁴¹ For a more complete overview of this debate see Robert A. Strong, *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Louisiana State Uni Press, Baton Rouge, 2000); Fink & Graham, *The Carter Presidency: Policy Choices in the Post New Deal Era*; Smith, *Morality, Reason and Power*; Richard C. Thornton, *The Carter Years: Towards a New Global Order* (Paragon House, Minnesota, 2007)

⁴⁴² Julius Nyerere, *Crusade for Liberation* (Oxford Uni. Press, 1978) p. 2

and 6,000 Cuban military advisors.⁴⁴³ Westad points to the success of this particular intervention, better planned and organised than its more haphazard response to Angola, as signalling a growing self-belief within the Soviet Union in its emergence as a global superpower and ability to decisively impact regional events.⁴⁴⁴ This increased Soviet role in Africa filled Washington with trepidation and sparked considerable debate amongst Carter's top foreign policy aids over how far these developments should be linked to on-going SALT negotiations and the broader superpower relationship.⁴⁴⁵ Carter's resulting shrill denouncement of Soviet-Cuban aggression in Africa only highlighted Washington's impotence to actually influence events on the Horn and put considerable strain on the superpower relations. Indeed, Brzezinski himself wrote in his memoirs, 'Détente lies buried in the sands of the Ogaden.'⁴⁴⁶ As such, the seemingly hopeful beginnings of Carter's Africa agenda were soon displaced by a much more traditional Cold War line.

It was in its relationship with its old ally in Congo, however, that the Carter administration's Cold War conservatism was most apparent. Having played such an integral part in the failed Kissinger Angola strategy towards Africa, Mobutu's Congo provides an excellent case study for the Carter dilemma of balancing a Cold War agenda with its espoused human rights priorities. Indeed, there is a certain irony that at the very time that President Carter publicly rejected, '... that inordinate fear of communism which once led us to embrace any dictator who joined us in that fear... (and to fight) fire with fire, never thinking that fire is better quenched with water'⁴⁴⁷, American planes were once more delivering much needed military aid to ensure the survival of its long-term ally and the continuation of Mobutu's corrupt twelve year regime. While keen to follow a European lead, the United States remained integral to backstopping Congo's leader when he was faced with spreading unrest and two separate cross-border attacks from the exiled Katangan force (now under the name of the National Front for the Liberation of Congo- FNLC) in Angola in the first two years of Carter's presidency. In other words, in the case of

⁴⁴³ Westad, *The Global Cold War* pp. 276-277; See also Louise Woodroffe, *Buried in the Sands of the Ogaden: The United States, the Horn of Africa and the Demise of Détente* (LSE Thesis Collection; 2007)

⁴⁴⁴ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* p. 279

⁴⁴⁵ A much cited Special Coordination Committee (SCC) meeting reveals precisely this debate over 'Linkage' between events on the Horn and the broad US-Soviet relations between Brzezinski and Vance. White House Situation Room, SCC Meeting on the Horn of Africa', 2nd March 1978; Vertical Files, Box 115, Jimmy Carter Library (JCL)

⁴⁴⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Power and the Principle: Memories of a National Security Adviser* (New York; Fonar, Strauss, Giroux, 1983) p. 189

⁴⁴⁷ Quote from a key foreign policy address given by President Carter at the University of Notre Dame, 22nd May 1977; cited in William Stueck, *'Placing Jimmy Carter's Foreign Policy'* in Gary M. Fink & Hugh Davis Graham, *The Carter Presidency: Policy Choices in the Post New Deal Era* (Uni Kansas Press, 1998) p. 247

Congo at least, it would appear that from its very outset the Carter administration chose to 'fight fire with fire', albeit partnered with European hard power projection. The 'water' of reforming Mobutu's corrupt and brutal regime always came second to the perceived security needs of the incumbent dictator. This chapter will thus examine the US approach to Congo during the Carter years, with particular attention to both its emphasis on human rights vis-à-vis the Mobutu regime and its support for the two Franco-Belgian military interventions to quell unrest in Congo's economic heartland of Shaba province (former Katanga) in the aptly named Shaba I and Shaba II operations.

The picture that ultimately emerges is one of ambivalence and surprising continuity. On the one hand, throughout his term the Carter White House did consistently pressure Mobutu towards economic, political and humanitarian reform with a greater degree of conditionality on American aid than had previously been seen in Washington or was demanded from its European allies. At the same time, however, US assistance to Mobutu continued throughout this period and, when push came to shove, the Cold War paradigm remained firmly in place. Following the example of its predecessors, the Carter administration once more preferred support for the status quo in Kinshasa in the name of stability to following its reformist tendencies to their logical conclusion and dropping its alliance with the intransigent Kinshasa despot. Furthermore, while there was a growing emphasis on the Soviet-Cuban involvement by the time of Shaba II, this triumph of 'stability' over 'reform' was consistently upheld from the very outset of the Carter years, perhaps revealing a more conventional Cold War stance from its inception than the president's rhetoric would immediately suggest.

Indeed, by contrast to the debate over the Horn, on the evidence available this reasoning does not appear to have been a major point of contention within the administration as Brzezinski, Vance and the various branches of the National Security apparatus seemingly concurred with this support for Mobutu already from Carter's first months in office.⁴⁴⁸ Moreover, wary of an active involvement in Africa or a reversion to covert operations, under Carter the United States once more looked to Europe to shoulder Congo's security burdens, much as Johnson had sought to do over a decade earlier. Unable to transcend traditional Cold War

⁴⁴⁸ The research on the American archives comes with the caveat that the State Department documents for this period unfortunately remain in the 'declassification' process at the time of writing. What follows is based largely on the reports and summaries that filtered through to Brzezinski and the White House (found in the Carter Library), as well as the CIA material made available on the CREST database at the National Archives II, MD. It may be necessary to revise some of the conclusions made here when the more in depth analytical reports of the State Department are made available.

paradigms and married once more to the old European order of the former colonial powers; the results were disastrous for Congo itself, for American standing in the region and, ultimately, even for its relations with its Soviet rival. Divided into three parts, the following pages will thus analyse each of the Shaban crises respectively before considering the broader implications of the Carter policies that developed in response in a final section.

Crisis and Continuity: Carter Surveys Shaba

As discussed in the previous two chapters, with the economic downturn of 1974 and following the unpopular Angola debacle, the by now bankrupt Mobutu regime was beset by perpetual crises that increasingly undermined its legitimacy.⁴⁴⁹ It did not take long for the new administration in Washington to be alerted to the plight of its troubled ally. In April 1977 Brzezinski received a summary of Ambassador Cutler's report describing, 'the spreading odour of political decay in Kinshasa.'⁴⁵⁰ In a telegram the previous month the Kinshasa embassy surmised the festering situation in Congo as follows,

'As reflected in our reporting for a long time, unhappiness with Mobutu's regime has gradually deepened as a result of a variety of grievances: prolonged and worsening economic conditions occasioned in part by depressed copper prices but also in large measure by gross mismanagement of the economy; widespread and often blatant corruption, starting at the top of the regime and seeping far down; conspicuous consumption by the regime's elite while it appeals for national austerity; misplaced priorities in allocating developmental resources, resulting in massive deterioration of the agricultural sector; ill-conceived policies with respect to education, the church and other national institutions; progressive political isolation of the leader from his followers.'⁴⁵¹

Cutler might have added to the above that the poor showing of the FAZ (Armed Forces of Zaire) in Mobutu's unpopular Angola foray seriously undermined the mainstay of his grip on the country. As a result, the Carter team inherited the

⁴⁴⁹ Congo's economic woes continued to abound with the CIA noting ever increasing foreign debt climbing to 1.7 billion dollars, inflation surpassing eighty per cent once more and political vendettas targeting the few competent officials associated with economic stability, such as the dismissal of Central Bank Governor Sambwa, further shaking creditor confidence. National Intelligence Daily Cable, Zaire: More Debt Relief, 13th August 1977; CREST, NARAI

⁴⁵⁰ Memorandum for Brzezinski, Situation Room: Evening Notes, 5th April 1977; President's Daily Report File, Box 1, NSA, Jimmy Carter Library, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter JCL)

⁴⁵¹ Cutler, Kinshasa telegram to Secretary of State, Subject: 'Shaba Invasion; Declining Prospects for Mobutu's Political Survival; Recommended US Action', 26th March 1977; NLC 16, Cables Files, Carter Library Research Tool (digital copies available in Carter Library Reading Room, hereafter CREST, JCL)

impending crisis predicted at the outset of Mobutu's Angola adventure by Lannon Walker, the Deputy Chief of the Kinshasa Embassy who became the State Department's Director for Central Africa under Carter, almost immediately upon assuming office. It came in the form of a military incursion by the former Katangan gendarmes exiled in Angola who had fought alongside the MPLA to repulse the FNLA/FAZ incursion. Well aware of the shortcomings of its long-term ally, within only a few weeks of assuming office the Carter White House was immediately presented with a stark test for its much-vaunted principled stand in the international arena. Ultimately, despite a seemingly accurate and sober assessment of the events on the ground, familiar arguments for the need of stability and the fear of chaos remained at the heart of Carter's approach to Congo illustrating the degree of Cold War conservatism that shaped its policies from the beginning.

On the 9th March, news reached the White House that an undetermined number of former Katangan gendarmes had attacked several towns in southern Congo in the area of Kisenge.⁴⁵² That the simmering dissatisfaction with the Mobutu regime finally boiled over into open confrontation in the Shaba region in early 1977 could not have come as a huge surprise to either Kinshasa or Washington observers. The mounting unpopularity of Congo's government was particularly acute in this neglected province with its secessionist tendencies since the country's independence. Coupled with a relatively well-trained fighting force of former Katangan gendarmes in exile across the Angolan border, no doubt encouraged by the FAZ's recent poor showing there, the situation was rife for further armed resistance into Congo. Moreover, the border was by no means secure following the official cessation of violence with the FNLA continuing its raids into Angola and the risk of retaliatory action into Congo the price of Mobutu's continued support for the defeated Angolan movement. Finally, with the traditional power seat of the persecuted Lundas transcending the Shaba borders into northern Angola and Zambia, ethnic tensions exacerbated the isolation of the region from the country's capital and assured widespread local support for any uprising or invading force along such lines.⁴⁵³ As the first towns fell to some two thousand invading Katangan fighters (of an estimated total force of four thousand) with the typically sluggish FAZ putting up little to no resistance, the mining centre and economic heartland of

⁴⁵² Memorandum for Brzezinski, The Situation Room: Noon Notes, 9th March 1977; President's Daily Report File, Box 1, NSA, JCL

⁴⁵³ Alan Donald, British Embassy Kinshasa to FCO London, 'Last Chance for Mobutu', 9th June 1978; FCO 99/162- Cuba/Zaire Shaba Invasion, Kew

Congo was precariously threatened.⁴⁵⁴ The details of the spreading invasion remained murky, however, and it is worth considering how Washington assessed the Katangan incursion.

Initially, the CIA offered a slightly alarmist appraisal of the invading force pointing to its ties to the MPLA, as well as its level of equipment and organisational prowess to suggest a more sinister superpower involvement,

'The invasion of Shaba Province has the appearance of a well-planned, professionally executed operation... These gendarmes have been trained over the years by Belgian, Portuguese, and now Cuban advisers...(The gendarmes) appear to be well equipped, and may be operating with Soviet-supplied armoured cars and multiple-tube rocket launchers. White advisory personnel reportedly have been seen with the Katangan troops in Shaba province.'⁴⁵⁵

The above intelligence report did not point this out but the implication of the Katangans willingness to switch allegiance from former colonial masters to Cuban revolutionaries clearly indicated a degree of pragmatism and a readiness to accept aid from any willing quarter rather than a deeper ideological commitment to the communist powers. Mobutu himself was, of course, eager to counter the poor performance of the FAZ in Shaba by once more relying on his superpower ally at a time of crisis and stressed the Soviet/Cuban support for the Katangan incursion with a virulent press campaign against this supposed communist aggression.⁴⁵⁶

Despite the initial CIA warnings, however, both the Kinshasa embassy and DC officials remained largely unimpressed by Mobutu's efforts. Indeed, Cutler was quick to point out the opportunistic nature of his allegations, 'Mobutu's efforts to internationalise the Shaba problem appear designed to put pressure on the US and its allies to stand up to the perceived Soviet threat in Africa.'⁴⁵⁷ At the same time the intelligence community in Washington conceded the lack of accurate intelligence to confirm any foreign meddling in the crisis, 'We really don't know very much in any detail. There is no confirmation of Cubans (although there are some white faces around) nor is there any confirmation that Luanda is controlling the operation

⁴⁵⁴ Memorandum for Thomas Thorne, INR from NIO/AF, 'Assessment of Developments in Zaire' 17th March 1977; CREST, NARAI

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Cutler, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Shaba Attack: Mobutu lashes out at Soviets and Cubans', 23rd March 1977; General Odom File, Box 61, NSA, JCL; Mobutu interview with Newsweek's Arnaud de Borchgrave asking whether it was US intention to simply abandon African moderates to Soviet expansionism and if they would be better served making their own arrangements, Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski, Situation Room: Noon Notes, 8th April 1977; President's Daily Report File, NSA, Box 1

⁴⁵⁷ Cutler, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Shaba Invasion: Consultations with Mobutu', 23rd March 1977; General Odom File, Box 61, NSA, JCL

(although they are obviously involved).'⁴⁵⁸ As such, the report that reached Brzezinski's desk at the White House stressed the local context of disturbances fuelled largely by grievances with the Mobutu regime,

'More than any other area of Zaire it has felt the impact of the economic slump. The general populace has felt for some time now that the government has not responded to its needs and secessionist feelings still run throughout much of the general population of the area... There is a danger that military operations in the area will spark widespread popular unrest against the Mobutu government.'⁴⁵⁹

At this early stage in its dealings with the wily Kinshasa despot then, the fledgling Carter administration seemed to respond with a healthy degree of scepticism to his manoeuvres to turn the spreading unrest into another Cold War intrigue in Congo.

While appreciative of its specifically local dimensions, the upheaval in Shaba nevertheless presented Washington with a serious policy dilemma as Carter's avowed effort for a more principled foreign policy approach ran into its first major Congolese test. The administration was acutely aware of the potential controversy entailed in any seeming endorsement of the unpopular Congolese dictator. Nor was a move towards a more direct American involvement in a further African conflict politically viable. On the other hand, considerable nervousness over the potential collapse of an ally seen firmly in the Western camp remained, with all that this might entail for Carter's standing in Africa and the world vis-à-vis recent Soviet gains in this arena. The problem was succinctly summarised in an interdepartmental discussion on Zaire policy as follows,

'The dilemma is a simple and traditional one. How far do we go to support a regime that is very imperfect but is friendly to us, with which we have been deeply involved, and which is seen to be our ally? To what extent is our credibility at stake? Will our help have any real chance of success in making the FAZ a capable instrument? Will our involvement tend to increase the already more than latent polarization along US-Soviet/Cuban lines?'⁴⁶⁰

Indeed, top-level policy advisers, from NSC staffers, the State Department and its Kinshasa embassy, the CIA and even the Policy Planning Staff under Anthony Lake,

⁴⁵⁸ Thomas P. Thornton, Memorandum for the Files, Subject: 'Zaire Situation' (Discussion between Thomas P. Thornton (NSC), Bill Odom, Anne Holloway (AF), Tom Buchanan (AF), Gerry Helman (IO) from State and Bill Parmenter (NIO) and -classified- (CIA)), 16th March 1977; CREST, NLC 24, North South, JCL

⁴⁵⁹ Memorandum for Brzezinski, The Situation Room: Noon Notes, 9th March 1977; President's Daily Report File, Box 1, NSA, JCL

⁴⁶⁰ Thornton, Memorandum for the Files, Subject: Zaire Situation (Discussion between Thomas P. Thornton (NSC), Bill Odom, Anne Holloway (AF), Tom Buchanan (AF), Gerry Helman (IO) from State and Bill Parmenter (NIO) and -classified- (CIA)), 16th March 1977; CREST, NLC 24, JCL

agonised over its response to the Shaba crisis and, despite this interagency approach, a remarkable consensus emerged.

It was largely accepted that American inaction would likely lead to the demise of the Mobutu government. Indeed, in a clear effort to transcend the traditional Cold War paradigm, Lake suggested that America's chief interest in Congo was 'the maintenance of sound economic relationship' which could be accomplished with 'almost any Zairian government'.⁴⁶¹ The CIA too considered that the continued access to Congolese strategic minerals (notably cobalt from Shaba making up some seventy-five per cent of American demand) could be maintained regardless of the regime that occupied the seat of power in Kinshasa.⁴⁶² Despite this seemingly progressive approach, however, no one was willing to go quite so far as to drop Mobutu completely. Indeed, the thought of a complete collapse of the Kinshasa regime still filled many corners of the administration with considerable trepidation.

The starkest warning over the consequences of such a development came in the form of a lengthy memorandum from Admiral Stansfield Turner. The Director of Central Intelligence pointed to the likely regional implications for southern Africa, the potential for escalating East-West involvement and the threat to American credibility if this African 'domino' did indeed fall. As such, Turner wrote,

'Mobutu's overthrow would be followed by turmoil in Zaire itself, with various factions and provincial regimes scrambling for pieces of the pie and beseeching support from the US, the Soviets and the Chinese... Radical groups would have the advantage of Shaba (the old Katanga) as a domestic support base and both nearby Angola and the Congo as actively helpful neighbours. We could expect Cubans to be invited to assist in stabilizing the situation... After the initial phase of disorder, and assuming a radical regime came to power, a regional realignment of forces would emerge, with Angola as the principle immediate regional beneficiary. Angola's other problems would be solved, although UNITA would not be immediately effected in the South; the Benguela Railway ultimately could be reopened; and a more secure base formed for the training of guerrilla forces for Namibia and, if necessary, for Rhodesia.'

Moreover, American prestige would be dealt a marked blow as,

⁴⁶¹ From Anthony Lake (Director of Policy Planning) and Leslie Gelb (Assistant Secretary of State for Political and Military Affairs) to Secretary Vance, 'Zaire Policy', 5th April 1977; RG59, P9, Records of Anthony Lake, Box 17, NARAH

⁴⁶² Memorandum from DCI Admiral Stansfield Turner to Brzezinski, Vance, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, JCS, 'Implications of the Collapse of the Government of Zaire', 17th March 1977; NLC 2, Dailey CIA Briefs CREST, JCL

‘Mobutu has long been identified throughout Africa and the Third World as a US client, presiding over a piece of highly strategic geography; his downfall could not fail to be perceived as a major “loss” for the US in Africa and especially if he had a radical successor, a potential if not actual “gain” for the USSR, and the radical socialist club in Africa.’⁴⁶³

In other words, despite the debacle of its failed Congo alliance in its Angola adventure, the new CIA chief held firm to the view that Mobutu at least served to protect a modicum of regional stability and his demise would only exacerbate the dangers of further foreign meddling and perceived Soviet-Cuban adventurism in Africa to the detriment of American interests.

Other quarters within the administration did not substantially contradict this view of Mobutu as a bastion for stability, continuity and American credibility. Even ambassador Cutler tempered his damning assessment of Mobutu’s regime cited at the beginning by pointing to Mobutu’s apparently significant pluses, ‘not the least of these is important fact of life that Mobutu, in contrast to any other leader since independence, has achieved the seemingly impossible by creating political stability nationwide and maintaining it for almost a dozen years.’⁴⁶⁴ NSC staffer Thomas Thornton too was quick to acknowledge Washington’s perception that there was no alternative to the Mobutu regime to secure American interests, ‘At the same time, we may well be selling Mobutu short, and a visible withdrawal of US support would spell the end for him. There is no desirable successor government standing in the wings.’⁴⁶⁵ Even Anthony Lake and Les Gelb’s carefully considered review of Congo policy for the State Department, with its emphasis on American economic stakes, acknowledged the apparent threat to regional stability and American credibility in the Shaba situation, concluding, ‘... We do not want to be vulnerable to the charge that we “walked away”.’⁴⁶⁶ As such, the shared opinion from the various corners of the Carter administration saw the Mobutu regime as an undesirable partner while at the same time viewing his demise as fraught with dangers for American interests and opportunities for Soviet advances. The question remained, however, over how this ambiguity could be translated into a meaningful policy response?

⁴⁶³ DCI Turner to Brzezinski, Vance, Brown, JCS, ‘Implications of the Collapse of the Government of Zaire’, 17th March 1977; NLC 2, CREST, JCL

⁴⁶⁴ Cutler, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, Subject: ‘Shaba Invasion; Declining Prospects for Mobutu’s Political Survival; Recommended US Action’ 26th March 1977; NLC 16, CREST, JCL

⁴⁶⁵ Thomas P. Thornton, Memorandum for the Files, Subject: ‘Zaire Situation’ (Discussion between Thomas P. Thornton (NSC), Bill Odom, Anne Holloway (AF), Tom Buchanan (AF), Gerry Helman (IO) from State and Bill Parmenter (NIO) and –classified– (CIA)), 16th March 1977; NLC 24, CREST, JCL

⁴⁶⁶ Lake and Gelb (Assistant Secretary of State for Political and Military Affairs) to Vance, Zaire Policy, 5th April 1977; RG59, P9, Records of Anthony Lake, Box 17, NARAII

In grappling with its options that ranged from the unfettered endorsement and reliance on Mobutu akin to that seen during the Kissinger years to abandoning its ally of old completely, the various departments desperately sought a compromise solution. It was the Kinshasa embassy that recommended a seemingly workable, if superficial, middle path between offering some assistance to Congo while staying aloof from the unpalatable regime. As such, Ambassador Cutler recommended that further support would be publically justified in terms of a principled stand to preserve Congo's territorial integrity, a concept inline with the OAU charter, while avoiding a close identification with Mobutu personally. Thus Cutler wrote,

'The problem which Mobutu's unpopularity poses for US diplomacy at a time when the territorial integrity of Zaire is threatened is a delicate one. In the absence of a clear indication that the US draws a distinction between support of principles and support for Mobutu, the perception here, and we presume abroad as well, risks being one of the US govt propping up a regime unwanted and unsupported by the populace. We believe it is in our own self-interest to begin to draw the distinction clearly and I believe the place to start is in the field of public diplomacy.'⁴⁶⁷

To be clear, this suggested break did not envision withdrawing support for the Kinshasa regime. Much rather, any such support should be justified in terms of the defence of Congo's sovereignty, rather than assisting Mobutu personally, to present it in a more palatable light. This is important as it indicates a schism between public rhetoric and actual policy that would become key to Washington's approach to Congo. Not nearly as free from old Cold War conservatism as Lake's analysis would suggest at first glance, the administration sought to distance itself from the Congolese dictator personally and avoid a deepening involvement in the crisis on the one hand, while at the same time searching for a way to counter threatening instability in Congo much as its predecessors had done.

Reverting to the familiar line that Africa remained the primary responsibility of the former colonial powers with the greatest stakes in the continent, the Carter administration cast a hopeful eye to Europe to meet Congo's most urgent security needs. Indeed, between Belgian's long-standing interests in Congo and a willing French activism in the region combined with its growing involvement in Congo itself, a ready-made European solution to the American dilemma was emerging. With this in mind, Secretary Vance flew to Paris at the beginning of April to consult

⁴⁶⁷ Cutler, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Shaba Invasion; Declining Prospects for Mobutu's Political Survival; Recommended US Action', 26th March 1977; NLC 16, CREST, JCL

with his Belgian and French counterparts. Indeed, before delving deeper into the unfolding American strategy, it is worth briefly reviewing the respective approaches of these two old Africa hands that would form the cornerstone of Carter's policies towards Congo.

Brussels officials sought to emphasise the apparent Cold War dimensions of the unfolding turmoil in Shaba, perhaps reflecting their narrow focus on immediate economic interests and a corresponding desire to secure the backing of its superpower ally. In Vance's meeting with Foreign Minister Van Elslande and his aide on the 2nd April, the Belgians stressed 'the extensive ideological and military preparation that had gone into the Katangan gendarmes' invasion of Shaba province...' explaining to Vance that the Katangans were '... now interested in overthrowing Mobutu in order to establish a new "Congo" which would be aligned with the Soviets and radical African states.' Vance chimed in to confirm the US view of this gloomy picture citing the threat to Zairian territorial integrity running the risk of 'destabilization throughout this region of Africa'.⁴⁶⁸ Both sides conveniently omitted the former alliance between the Belgians and the Katangans of the early 1960s from the discussion over the former secessionists' presumed ideological reorientation and appeared united in their desire for swift action to resolve the unrest in Shaba.

According to Belgian estimates, with more adequate leadership the FAZ could be turned into a capable fighting force to deal with the Katangan incursion. At the same time, Belgian policy recommendations sought to accommodate both American domestic constraints, repeatedly stressed by Vance, and their own reluctance to become too intimately involved with Mobutu personally in view of past turbulences in Kinshasa-Brussels relations. As such, the Belgians once again saw a possible solution in the tried and tested tactic of introducing mercenaries to stiffen the resolve of Congo's armed forces. His allies could confine themselves to supplying debt relief and equipment to free up funds for Mobutu to make his own arrangements in hiring additional manpower. Indeed, the record of a meeting between Thornton and Belgian Deputy Chief of Mission Alfred Cahen in Washington on the 5th of April suggests certain currents within the Belgian camp were deliberating over more drastic measures, even considering alternatives to Mobutu at Congo's helm. The following passage summarising this meeting was highlighted with the comment 'good', presumably by Brzezinski- the recipient of the summary,

⁴⁶⁸ Vance, Paris to Brzezinski, 'Secretary's Meeting with Foreign Minister Van Elslande', 3rd April 1977; NLC 16, CREST, JCL

'His (Cahen) policy proposal is that the Belgians and French supply mercenaries and military equipment while the United States sends food and medical supplies. The object would be to stabilize the situation so that Mobutu could gracefully withdraw and some more acceptable figure, such as Foreign Minister Nguza could put the pieces together.'⁴⁶⁹

The available record goes no further on this so whether Cahen's statement was simply the speculative whim of a lone individual, or whether the matter was quietly dropped by a Belgian parliament unwilling to pursue such a course only weeks before a general election, remains unclear. Whatever the case, this discussion was quickly overtaken by events as the French offered a more enticing and perhaps realistic alternative still.

Following the independence of its colonies in Africa, France had expended considerable effort towards preserving its influence and protecting its interests in the former dependencies through a series of bilateral economic, cultural and defence agreements and even the establishment of a single currency area pegged to the Franc (Communautés Financière Africaine). This approach reflected as much a desire to maintain preferential economic ties and access to markets and strategic raw materials (notably uranium), as it looked to seize a Third World opportunity to project French prestige and support claims to continued global influence and major power status. By the late 1970s and the presidency of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, this classical neo-colonial approach was matched by a resurgent French militarism in Africa with interventions underway in Chad, Mauritania and Djibouti in what became known as French 'Gendarmeism' on the continent.⁴⁷⁰ In an effort to extend its influence in francophone Africa beyond its immediate colonial roots, France thus built up both economic and military assistance ties with the Mobutu regime throughout the 1970s.⁴⁷¹ As such, by the time of the Shaba crisis, France had

⁴⁶⁹ Thornton, Memorandum for Brzezinski, North-South: Evening Reports, 5th April 1977; NLC 10, Evening Reports, CREST, JCL

⁴⁷⁰ Robin Luckham, 'French Militarism' in *Review of African Political Economy* No. 24, (May-August, 1982) pp. 55-84; See also Guy Martin, 'The Historical, Economic and Political Base of France's Africa Policies' in *Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 23 No. 2 (June 1985); Martin Staniland, 'Francophone Africa: The Enduring French Connection' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 489 (Jan. 1987);

⁴⁷¹ On the economic front, alongside installing a Creusot-Loire dairy factory at Nsele and the SOTEXKI textile factory in Kisangani, France also indulged Mobutu's penchant for prestige projects such as the International Trade Centre of Zaire, a thirteen station satellite communications network and the broadcasting facilities of the Voice of Zaire in Kinshasa; all financed with loans guaranteed by the French government. In the military sphere, following an initially secret technical assistance agreement in 1974 and the sale of Mirage fighter jets and Alouette and Puma helicopters; French military sales to Congo actually surpassed those of the United States by the end of the decade according to data prepared by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Ibid. p. 71; B. Verhaegan, 'Les Safaris Technologiques au Zaire, (1970-80)' in *Politique Africaine; Gaspillages* no. 18 (Juin 1985) pp. 71-87

established a considerable stake in the Mobutu regime and clearly viewed Congo as within its sphere of influence in francophone Africa.

In the meeting with his Belgian counterparts, Vance told Van Elslande that Giscard had informed him that morning of having, 'just received a call from King Hassan, who had expressed a willingness to have an unspecified number of Moroccan "volunteers" to go to Zaire.'⁴⁷² As the various observers in Washington and Europe ostensibly favoured an 'African' solution to Congo's security issues, the French/Moroccan offer seemed to offer a convenient regional option to strengthen Mobutu's wavering regime. As a result, from the vantage of the Carter administration, Vance's Paris trip yielded a seemingly workable if superficial solution to its Congo dilemma. After various rumours and denials from Rabat in the first week of April, the French embassy eventually confirmed that France would airlift approximately 1,500 Moroccan troops to Shaba province. At the same time the FAZ would be assisted by some fifty Belgian and sixty-five French military advisers. Mobutu was even able to enlist the support of Arab allies with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates providing some financial aid to pay for the Moroccan troops in what the Situation Room described as a 'timely boost' to 'Kinshasa's near empty coffers'.⁴⁷³ As such, Mobutu's most pressing security concerns were addressed and the United States could confine itself to supplying largely non-lethal assistance in this field; as it airlifted parachutes, clothing, radios, batteries and spare parts to assist the FAZ-Moroccan effort and contributed some thirty million dollars in Foreign Military Sales credits.⁴⁷⁴

To be sure, even the administration avowed contention that it was supplying 'non-lethal' aid was not strictly speaking true in the final analysis. When the FAZ was running low on M-16 ammunition, the White House was quick to approve Vance's recommendation for the transfer of two million rounds in accordance with ambassador Cutler's suggestion.⁴⁷⁵ Faced with serious resistance and an organised military force for the first time, the Katangans withdrew across the border within a month and the immediate military threat to Shaba and the country at large quickly evaporated.

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, www.sipri.org; The Institute itself cautions that its sources cannot always be 100% accurate and should be used to indicate trends.

⁴⁷² Telegram from Secretary Vance, Paris to Brzezinski, DC, Secretary's Meeting with Foreign Minister Van Elslande, 3rd April 1977; NLC 16, CREST, JCL

⁴⁷³ Memorandum for Brzezinski, Situation Room: Evening Notes, 27th April 1977; President's Daily Report File, Box 2, NSA, JCL

⁴⁷⁴ Vance to American Embassy Brussels, 'Border Attack on Zaire', 14th March 1977; General Odom File, Box 61, NSA, JCL

⁴⁷⁵ Vance to the president, 'Military Aid to Zaire'; NLC 2, CREST, JCL

As such, in the immediate term the Carter White House could perhaps be satisfied with its first encounter with the Mobutu state. The threat of Congo's disintegration, and all that this might entail for the wider region in the minds of Washington policy makers, had been averted. Moreover, France- and to a lesser extent Belgium- had shouldered the bulk of Congo's security burden permitting the United States to put some welcome distance between itself and the Mobutu regime. That this could only be the first step towards a broader rescue of Congo was clear, however. Most notably, there remained the spectre of Congo's imminent fiscal collapse into bankruptcy. As such, despite Mobutu's failure to comply to the 1976 IMF stabilisation plan, the United States was again integral in mustering renewed commitments from the Paris Club, the IMF and the various corporate bank donors to prolong Congo's public and private debt by another year, thus temporarily forestalling the country's financial collapse.⁴⁷⁶ In other words, while playing only a secondary role in the security field, the United States remained integral to the continued propping up of the Mobutu regime throughout this period.

That the Carter administration's response to the first Shaba crisis was not without domestic critics soon became clear. A Washington Post editorial at the time of the first US airlift of equipment to Zaire illustrates this scepticism over the US-Congo alliance as it pointed to Mobutu's poor human rights record, the opaque nature of the Shaba disturbances and post-Vietnam anxiety over being drawn into another third world conflict. Perhaps more importantly still, the editorial saw Carter as falling far short of his initial promise and setting dangerous precedents in his first confrontation with Congo and the third world, 'It is odd to see him reacting to his first challenge in the pattern of the previous administration: hustling more security assistance to a long-time client state which may or may not be under Cuban guns.'⁴⁷⁷ Indeed, the administration itself was acutely aware of this popular rejection of Mobutu in America and a State Department background briefing ahead of Vice President Walter Mondale's meeting with Congo's Foreign Minister Nguza Karl-I-Bond in Washington in July 1977 summarised this sentiment as follows, 'This "measured" US response (to Shaba I) was not supported by some members of

⁴⁷⁶ 'Cost of Zairian Stabilization & Recovery' (Fragment: no date or author given- presumably late 1978); General Odom File, Box 61, NSA, JCL

⁴⁷⁷ *The Washington Post*, 'Why Zaire?' March 16, 1977; Editorial; p. A20

Congress and the public who view Mobutu's regime as corrupt and having a poor record on human rights.'⁴⁷⁸

The administration was thus at least in part responding to a popular and Congressional mood against the support of obviously corrupt and unpalatable dictators when it began to champion the reform of the Kinshasa government. Framing its military and fiscal bailout in terms of a necessary first step towards a more comprehensive rehabilitation of the Mobutu regime proved a useful tool in selling American policy to Congress and the public at large at this stage. The reformist concerns of the Carter administration were added after the fact and only once Mobutu's pressing security concerns had been met, of course. This should not detract from the fact that for the first time a consistent call for an economic and political overhaul coloured Washington's dealings with its Kinshasa ally, however. These pressures stood in stark contrast to Kissinger's response to similar cries to modernise the state of Congo. It is worth recalling that even after the Angola debacle the then Secretary of State ignored the better judgment of his Africa specialists and completely avoided the issue of reform in his personal meetings with Mobutu. Throughout the Carter years, on the other hand, the issue of economic reform along the lines of the various IMF stabilization plans, the need for greater political decentralization and plurality and pressure for improvement in Congo's human rights record remained constant (if secondary) themes both in the administration's dealings with Congo and its European allies. While no more effective in the long run, this translated into a visible cooling of relations between Washington and Kinshasa.

Already during the first Shaba crisis Mobutu was visibly disgruntled in what he saw as a lack of support from his trusted US ally and sought to retaliate with a familiar trick.⁴⁷⁹ Reverting to a diplomatic stunt that had made Kissinger's pulse race only two years earlier, he once more fired accusations at American diplomats in Congo asserting that American Consul Borg in Lubumbashi was conspiring against the central government with local Lunda leaders. Again, it is difficult to know what the exact motivations behind this were but it is likely that, just as in 1975, Mobutu sought to reinvigorate the relationship and provoke a positive reaffirmation of fidelity from his Washington ally. This time, however, he was to be

⁴⁷⁸ Christine Dodson to Denis Clift, Vice President Mondale's Meeting with Zairian Commissioner for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Nguza Karl-I. Bond, 26th July, 1977; Subject File, Box CO 67, WHCF, JCL

⁴⁷⁹ Memorandum for Brzezinski, Situation Room: Evening Notes 1st April 1977; President's Dailey Report File, Box 1, NSA, JCL

disappointed by the more measured reaction from Washington. Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher simply advised the president to ignore a likely retaliation 'for what he sees as our lack of support during the Shaba invasion'⁴⁸⁰ in the hope that it would blow over. Indeed, unable to push this matter without risking a further deterioration of relations, within only a few weeks Mobutu informed ambassador Cutler that the issue had been dropped and Borg was not required to leave the country.⁴⁸¹

Alongside this rather aggressive sulking, Mobutu also looked to woo the Carter White House by sending a number of emissaries to Washington in an apparent effort to bridge the gulf with his long-term ally, both as expressions of gratitude for continued support and to discuss Mobutu's own much-vaunted reform plans. Despite repeated requests from the Congolese president, however, both Foreign Minister Nguza in July 1977 and his replacement Umba di Lutete and Minister of Plan Mulamba in March 1978 were denied access to the president and had to content themselves with brief encounters with Vice President Mondale and the Assistant National Security Adviser David Aaron. This was a conscious decision by the Carter administration and again was a visible shift from the very public endorsements Mobutu had received from Nixon and Kissinger. Furthermore, in each of the above meetings reform was the central theme demonstrating the importance US officials ascribed to goading the Kinshasa regime down this path. Time and again, both the embassy in Kinshasa and Washington officials stressed the need for tangible progress on economic and political reform for American aid to continue. Mobutu himself certainly responded with the appropriate public gestures, a much-publicised speech on 25th November 1977 thus committing his regime to a renewed modernisation effort. Under Belgian tutelage, the 'Mobutu Plan' proposed a typically 'ill defined conceptual approach to economic recovery and reform', including a call for foreign specialists to man key government agencies and reduce economic mismanagement.⁴⁸² With both the Carter administration and its Congo ally apparently committed to this reformist drive, the question remains why this shifting emphasis and modernising approach during the Carter years failed to have more of an impact?

⁴⁸⁰ Warren Christopher, Memorandum for the President 1st June 1977; Plains File, Subject File, Box 37, JCL

⁴⁸¹ Memorandum for the White House: 'Mobutu Drops Request for Withdrawal of Borg', 22nd June 1977; President's Dailey Report File, Box 2, NSA, JCL

⁴⁸² Briefing Memorandum for David Aaron for Meeting with Zairian Emissaries Umba & Mulamba, 3rd March 1978; Country File, Zaire, Box 87, NSA, JCL

From the outset it was clear that Mobutu presented a difficult proposition when it came to influencing the internal dynamics and future direction of Congo. The past twelve years had seen a gulf between government rhetoric and actual policy, as the wily dictator established his hold on the country through a system of fear, corruption and patronage as has been noted. Reform would thus threaten the very essence of 'Mobutism' and the foundations of his power and his bold announcements were treated with a healthy scepticism in Washington. On the economic front, despite previous declarations of this nature Congo had failed to adhere to both IMF stabilization plans of 1976 and 1977, as the CIA intelligence briefs were quick to point out. As a result, the Mobutu government remained ineligible for further drawdowns of IMF aid by 1978 and previously negotiated private bank loans of some 250 million dollars were withheld for similar reasons.⁴⁸³ In the realm of political reform the picture was even bleaker. Calls for a greater devolution of power and inclusive politics would be disappointed by Mobutu reverting to the purging of his top political and military ranks in response to the festering Shaba unrest. In August 1977 the CIA reported, 'Mobutu's purge of civilian officials appears aimed at creating scapegoats, eliminating potential rivals and their supporters, and warning critics of his one-man rule.'⁴⁸⁴ This political purge was followed by an alleged coup-plot, trials and executions the following February and a further large-scale purge of the military. Again, the targets of this campaign were largely from Congo's more restless regions. Thus the CIA noted, 'Some 700 men- 12 per cent of the officer corps- are being dismissed because Mobutu has doubts about the loyalty of personnel from Zaire's eastern and southern provinces... Mobutu periodically purges the military, but this purge is the largest in the memory of Embassy officers.'⁴⁸⁵ This rather familiar *modus operandi* must have cast doubt on the sincerity of Mobutu's proclaimed reform program from its very outset.

Perhaps the strongest indication, however, that Mobutu would do everything within his power to protect his personal hold on Congo could be found in the personal vendetta he pursued against his own Foreign Minister, Nguza Karl-I-Bond.

⁴⁸³ Cost of Zairian Recovery (Undated/Unsigned Memorandum- from early 1978, presumably from State to Brzezinski); General Odom File, Box 61, NSA, JCL; CIA, National Intelligence Dailey Cable: 'Zaire Economic Recovery Scheme', 27th February 1978; CREST, NARAI

⁴⁸⁴ That this crackdown would target even the few qualified technicians at Congo's disposal was demonstrated by the removal of the apparently able governor of the Central Bank Jules-Fontaine Sambwa.

CIA, National Intelligence Dailey Cable: 'Zaire: Ouster of Foreign Minister', 13th August 1977; CREST, NARAI

⁴⁸⁵ CIA, National Intelligence Dailey Cable: 'Zaire: Political Dismissals', 18th April 1978; CREST, NARAI

From sending Nguza as his personal envoy to Washington in July 1977, Mobutu turned on his Foreign Minister the very next month, accusing him of high treason for withholding information on the impending Katangan incursion into Shaba earlier that year. Following his arrest that August, along with Daniel Muteb Tshombe in Shaba (also known as Mbumba Muteba II, the Lunda Mwant Yav or leader), Nguza was duly sentenced to death the following month. Whether Mobutu was genuinely suspicious of Nguza, himself a Lunda related to Moise Tshombe, or simply reacting to his Foreign Minister's growing stature and acclaim both at home and abroad is difficult to assess. That the Belgians viewed him as a viable successor to Mobutu was noted earlier and, perhaps more critically, the CIA reported that many influential Congolese were discussing Mobutu's vulnerability and Nguza's prospects so openly that the latter issued a public declaration of support for his president to ward off further speculation.⁴⁸⁶ His sudden fall from favour and the fact that Mobutu subsequently commuted his death sentence smacks of a degree of cynicism with regards to the veracity of the charges brought against the rising Congolese politician. Indeed, Nguza's story in Congolese politics is an intriguing one in itself. Following cruel torture while imprisoned that reportedly left him impotent, Nguza would be pardoned and rehabilitated to the regime the following year before defecting abroad and both testifying to Congress and publishing a book of indictments against Mobutu in 1982.⁴⁸⁷ In an illustration of Mobutu's manipulative powers and the reach of his patronage, by 1985 Nguza returned to the fold of his erstwhile president to serve once more as Congo's foreign minister and then prime minister- reportedly against receipt of ten million dollars for his rediscovered loyalty.⁴⁸⁸

The above serves to indicate not only Mobutu's resilience to economic and political reform, as well as his continued human rights transgressions, but also that this was once more clearly apparent to contemporary observers in the first year of the Carter presidency. Moreover, while Mobutu's hold on the country may have been tenuous, it illustrates the extreme difficulties of any alternative political leadership emerging in Congo and the skill with which the entrenched dictator manipulated the levers of power to assure his continued survival. Nevertheless, while effectively blocking the emergence of an alternative political force, the first

⁴⁸⁶ CIA, National Intelligence Dailey Cable; 'Zaire: Ouster of Foreign Minister', 13th August 1977; CREST, NARAH

⁴⁸⁷ Nguza Karl I Bond, *Mobutu: Ou L'incarnation du Mal Zairois* (London, Rex Collings; 1982)

⁴⁸⁸ According to Radio Trottoir as cited in Michaela Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz* (Fourth Estate; London, 2000) pp. 101-102

Shaba uprising had clearly shown that Mobutu was dependent on outside intervention to pacify dissident provinces and ultimately retain control of the country.⁴⁸⁹ As such, the greatest obstacle to the reform of Congo, to which both the Carter administration and Mobutu himself had now publically committed themselves, was the renewed outbreak of violence in Shaba province that constitutes the subject of the next section.

Carter certainly made the right noises to suggest a complete break with Kissinger's heavy reliance on and involvement with Congo's tyrant as a lynchpin of US Africa policy, as Washington increasingly looked to his European allies to shoulder the burden of Congolese security with a Moroccan veil. This is a little misleading, however. First of all, the Moroccan fig leaf designed to provide an African cover for the American-European sponsored operations in Congo was both transparent and cynical. While King Hassan had voiced his concern over apparent Soviet gains in Africa and the encirclement of Europe in a meeting with Under Secretary of State Habib that April, according to Moroccan comments to Washington officials they acquiesced to the Shaba plan only after considerable French pressure.⁴⁹⁰ Furthermore, the Carter administration may have been keen to stress the renewed distance between Washington and its Kinshasa ally but, according to Mobutu himself, it remained the single largest donor during the Shaba crisis.⁴⁹¹ At the same time, the rescheduling of Congo's debt was scarcely imaginable without the agreement and active cajoling of other creditors by the United States. Even the claim of only supplying non-lethal aid proved false upon closer examination. All this reflects the administration's intent not to abandon the Mobutu regime.

Indeed, this allows for some more general and less sanguine conclusions. On the one hand, the Carter administration did recognise the local discontent and very regional dimension of the Katangan incursion and various commentators pointed to the fact that US economic interests and access to raw materials could most likely be upheld even if the Mobutu regime fell, regardless of the nature of the successor

⁴⁸⁹ This view of Mobutu's survival as contingent upon outside support was clearly shared by the CIA intelligence assessment in early 1978- 'Unless he obtain substantial foreign military and economic assistance, Mobutu may not survive.' CIA, Intelligence Daily, 'Zaire: Background to the Struggle'; CREST, NARAI

⁴⁹⁰ American Ambassador Anderson, Rabat to Secretary of State, 'Under Secretary Habib's April 15th Meeting with King Hassan Part II- Africa', 17th April 1977; NLC 16, CREST JCL ; Memorandum for Brzezinski, Situation Room: Evening Notes: 'French Assistance to Zaire', 15th April 1977; President's Daily Report File, Box 1, NSA, JCL

⁴⁹¹ Summary of meeting between Ambassador Cutler and Mobutu on post-Shaba developments, Memorandum for the White House: 'Meeting with Mobutu', 27th June, 1977; President's Daily Report File, Box 2, NSA, JCL

regime. Despite considerable deliberation over the potential consequences and pitfalls of abandoning the Mobutu regime informing Washington's decision makers, however, none of these analyses were ultimately able to transcend the traditional Cold War paradigm of its predecessors. In other words, just as consecutive administrations from Johnson to Ford had argued, the view of Mobutu as a guarantor of stability and the fear that the fall of his regime would lead to communist gains, not only in Congo but with dangerous implications for the wider region, remained the single most important consideration behind Carter's Congo policy even at this early stage. Carter had signalled the ushering in of new foreign policy era that would no longer be held hostage by an 'inordinate fear of communism'. In Congo, however, the administration was far from free of such burdens. Ultimately, Washington wanted to publically distance itself from an unpalatable regime while at the same time ensuring it received the support necessary for its survival. France and Belgium supplied readymade answers to this dilemma. This was not a radical shift in approach but simply a transfer of responsibility for the maintenance of stability and order to America's European partners. It is worth noting that this is not terribly different to the policies of the Johnson years looking to Europe as the principle influence in its traditional sphere. As such, from the very outset of its term, a very traditional Cold War approach to Congo prevailed in the Carter administration with considerable uniformity. A more immediate implication of this renewed reliance on Europe was that, rather than ushering in a fresh and reinvigorated approach to dealing with the uncertainties of Africa's independence struggle, this first encounter with the continent saw Washington once more aligned with the ancien régime of the former Franco-Belgian colonial order.

Shaba II, Renewed Cold War Diatribes and Reform

In his memoirs, Brzezinski quotes his diary to explain the American support for another French airdrop in 1978 as an important display of American determination, not least to the Chinese ahead of his upcoming trip to China. He went on, 'We in fact took action in response to major unrest in Zaire, apparently fomented with some Angolan and probably Cuban assistance.'⁴⁹² The reality of the situation in Congo was, of course, much more complicated, but Brzezinski's passing treatment illustrates an increasing readiness to couch events in Congo in the most basic Cold War terms by the time of the second Shaba crisis.

The initial justification for rushing to the rescue of the Kinshasa regime in the spring of 1977 was to buy time for its leader to enact a much needed reform agenda. By May of the following year, however, Congo's president had fallen woefully short of his public pledges. Rather than the decline in American support that might have been expected, however, with the outbreak of fresh violence following a second Katangan incursion the Franco-Belgian-American coalition once more jumped to the rescue of its failing ally. Most immediately, this loose alliance responded with the direct intervention of Belgian and French troops assisted by American equipment and airlift capabilities, in an ostensibly humanitarian rescue operation of Western expatriates in Shaba. This was followed by the organisation of an 'International African Force' (IAF) to shoulder Congo's security burden in Shaba, the launching of a further retraining effort of the FAZ and a renewed financial bailout.

While calls for reform and the conditionality of this aid continued, a further development in the Carter line made cooperation from Mobutu even less likely. For the first time since Kissinger's Angola debacle, events in Congo were once more publically framed in stark East-West terms and the need for the United States to stand tall and face down Soviet-Cuban adventurism in Africa. As such, the public denouncements of an apparent Soviet-Cuban role in the second Katangan incursion, led by President Carter himself, marked a significant shift at least in the administration's rhetorical approach to Congo and further dented any hope for an effective remodelling of the reluctant Kinshasa regime. The details of the second Shaba crisis in May 1978, the American response and its impact on the on-going

⁴⁹² Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle; Memoirs of the National Security Advisor, 1977-81* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson; London, 1983) pp. 208-9

effort to goad Congo's recalcitrant despot towards political and economic reform merit further consideration as Carter espoused an increasingly conservative line.

On the 15th May 1978, Kinshasa informed Washington that it would once again seek help in the face of another Katangan raid into Shaba province. Reportedly, some eight to twelve hundred Katangans had crossed the border from Caianda in Angola with a further estimated four thousand uncommitted troops remaining on the Angolan territory.⁴⁹³ The following day the CIA reported that the returning Katangan insurgents had taken control of most of the mining town of Kolwezi, reportedly capturing the foreign residential sectors and the airfield along with several Italian-made fighter aircraft, two helicopters, one transport and several utility aircraft. This intelligence report noted that the invading force had refined its tactics from a year earlier in what appeared to be 'a well-conceived, coordinated attack on pre-selected objectives.' As such, the Katangans initial strike was aimed at the mining town of Kolwezi directly- 'a target of strategic and symbolic importance', according to the CIA.⁴⁹⁴ Washington observers were once more flustered by the speed of events in Shaba. Moreover, on this occasion the attack not only threatened Congo's economic heartland and by extension the Mobutu regime itself, but it also endangered Western direct material interests and even risked the lives of American and European expatriates in the area.

The CIA reported that, in contrast to Shaba I, the fall of major towns in the copper belt during the second incursion was now severely harming Congo's mining operations; accounting for seventy to eighty per cent of its gross domestic product, seventy-five per cent of Zaire's copper production, ninety per cent of cobalt production, and all its zinc production. Perhaps even more concerning than the inherent threat this entailed for the Mobutu regime was the immediate effect of the violence on Western access to these strategic minerals and the corresponding economic consequences. While noting that world copper consumers had sufficient stockpiles to resist even a total suspension of Congolese output without significant hardship, the loss of its cobalt supply would prove more serious. The CIA commented with some concern, 'Short-term reductions in cobalt output by Zaire, however, could be serious because Zaire is the free world's leading supplier.'

⁴⁹³ Memorandum (no author given), Status of American Citizens in Kolwezi/Zairian Army Operations 16th May 1978; Country File, Zaire, Box 87, NSA, JCL; NB, According to Odom, while their exact number is uncertain, at least a portion of the Katangans entered Congo from Zambia on this occasion (Odom, p. 12). see Lt. Colonel Thomas P. Odom, Shaba II: The French and Belgian Intervention in Zaire in 1978 (US Army Combined Arms Center, Command and General Staff College; Fort Leavenworth Papers, 1993) available at www.cgsc.edu/carl/resources/csl/odom2/odom2.asap

⁴⁹⁴ CIA, National Intelligence Daily Cable: Zaire Situation Report, 16th May 1978; CREST, NARAI

Consumers are already experiencing scarcities and skyrocketing prices.’⁴⁹⁵ Moreover, with over two thousand European and seventy-five American expatriates (largely Morrison-Knudsen employees and their entourage) manning the mines and infrastructure projects of Kolwezi, concerns over reprisals against the white community mounted alongside these considerations. With the FAZ once more proving incapable of dealing with the Katangan dangers alone; the threat to its long-term ally in Kinshasa, the economic implications of the fall of this mining town and the dangers to the foreign population provided both an immediate interest and a justification to once more galvanise the West into action.

Before considering the policies that unfolded, however, it is worth noting a response that was almost entirely neglected by both the United States and its European allies. At no point was any effort to establish links with the Katangan leadership or a politically negotiated inclusive settlement between Kinshasa and the disgruntled periphery attempted or even seriously considered in Washington. This is remarkable for several reasons. First of all, despite the immediate threat of a disruption to mineral supplies due to the spreading violence, various analysts had pointed out that overall US aims could be achieved with almost any Congo government as was noted earlier. Secondly, describing the insurgents simply as ‘Katangans’ was not entirely accurate as the growing unrest in Shaba was representative of a much wider popular dissatisfaction with the regime. As such, the CIA noted,

‘The Zairian Government has said the invaders are Katangan rebels, but it has applied the term “Katangan” to anti-Mobutu elements in general. The rebels’ basic force probably consists of tribal relatives recruited by the original Katangan exiles, other political dissidents from Zaire, and some vagrant Angolans. The rebel leadership itself describes its movement as a popular anti-Mobutu uprising consisting of Zairians from all regions.’⁴⁹⁶

Finally and most significantly, both the United States and its French partners were approached on at least three documented occasions by the Katangans seeking assistance with regards to events in Congo but failed to pursue these openings to establish links with the opposition movements in Congo or reach an inclusive negotiated settlement.

In the aftermath of the first Shaba crisis, members of the FNLC sought to appeal to the American president directly hoping for support in pressuring Mobutu into a

⁴⁹⁵ CIA, National Intelligence Daily Cable: Zaire Situation Report, 17th May 1978; CREST, NARAH

⁴⁹⁶ CIA, National Intelligence Daily Cable: Zaire Situation Report, 17th May 1978; CREST, NARAH

more inclusive style of government. As such, two opposition leaders, Mbwa Mika and Mutsha Mokoia, formulated a letter to President Carter on July 3rd 1977 that voiced profound scepticism over Mobutu's promised reforms and made a desperate appeal for Kinshasa's American backers to effect a more pluralistic politics in Congo, 'We expect much of you, Mr. President. We know that you will use all your influence to obtain for us that second party, without which the announced reforms would only bring a few months of distraction before a return to the old.'⁴⁹⁷ In a similar vein, in January 1978 the brother of the Lunda Mwant Yav in Shaba made an appeal to the French Consul in Lubumbashi for France to pressure Mobutu to offer an amnesty to the Katangans and seek rapprochement with the rebellious elements.⁴⁹⁸ Finally, even in the aftermath to the second Shaba war, members of the Katangan 'National Front for the Liberation of Congo' (FNLC) 'accosted' officials in the American embassy in Brussels to convey the inclusive nature of their genuinely anti-Mobutu movement, free of Communist influence, appealing for a cessation of all foreign meddling and pressure on Mobutu to step aside 'to let peace and progress return to the potentially rich nation'.⁴⁹⁹ While the Belgian record remained inaccessible at the time of writing, the French embassy in Kinshasa nevertheless pointed to Belgian contacts with the FNLC and their desire for a negotiated settlement over the renewed violence.⁵⁰⁰ The State Department response to these overtures remained typical throughout, however. A reply to the letter addressed to President Carter was rejected with the familiar reference to Congo's sovereignty stating that 'President Mobutu would be almost certain to construe this as unwarranted interference in Zairian domestic politics,' and the latest FNLC overtures were simply dismissed as Katangan propaganda.⁵⁰¹ With both Washington and Paris ignoring the possibility of a negotiated diplomatic solution to the festering Shaba problem, events on the ground in Kolwezi itself ensured that

⁴⁹⁷ Letter from Katangan leader Mbwa Mika and Mutsha Mokoia to President Carter, 3rd July 1977 (passed from Godefroid Munongo- the Katangan leader notorious for his part in Lumumba's murder- to Ian Mladek- a recently retired IMF official- who delivered the letter to David Aaron on September 7th 1977); Subject File, Box C067, WHCF, JCL

⁴⁹⁸ French Consul Pierre Guth, Lubumbashi to Ambassador André Ross, Kinshasa, '*Situation au Shaba*', 2nd January 1978; Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Kinshasa, Ambassade, Carton 45, CADN

⁴⁹⁹ Memorandum for Brzezinski, Situation Room, Additional Information Items: 'FNLC Representatives in Belgium Views on Shaba', 2nd June 1978; President's Daily Report File, Box 5, NSA, JCL

⁵⁰⁰ Ambassador Ross and Jean Christophe Chouvet (Stagiaire de l'Ecole Nationale d'Administration) to Louis de Guiringaud, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, 'Étude Sur les Événements de Kolwezi', 9th August 1978; Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Kinshasa, Ambassade, Carton 45, CADN

⁵⁰¹ Executive Secretary of State Department, Peter Tarnoff, Memorandum to Brzezinski 23rd August 1977; Subject File, Box C067, WHCF, JCL

their policy options became more limited still as the expatriate population was targeted for the first time with 38 Europeans reportedly killed on the 17th May.⁵⁰²

In his autopsy of the second Shaba intervention, the French Ambassador to Congo, André Ross, clearly saw the humanitarian justification as integral to the renewed Western intervention in Shaba on behalf of the Mobutu regime. The view that Katangan brutality roused the West to act once more is a little simplistic, however, and closer examination reveals traces of Mobutu's manipulations. First of all, it should be noted that the Katangan forces had been relatively civil to the nervous expatriate population during the 'War of Eighty Days' in 1977, even on occasion permitting American missionaries to use their radios to update the American consulate on their welfare.⁵⁰³ During the second crisis, the French embassy reported orders found on captured Katangans expressly forbidding any reprisals against the foreign workers of Kolwezi, no doubt keenly aware that this could be used as a pretext for Western interference.⁵⁰⁴ The Katangans apparently having maintained order in Kolwezi for several days, the French analysis simply attributed the subsequent descent into looting and violence to the exhausted invaders turning to hemp and drink, as well as joining forces with less disciplined local youths.⁵⁰⁵ While the exact picture of events on the ground remains murky, even the French autopsy of events allows for a further dimension to this loss of discipline. As the CIA had noted, with the fall of Kolwezi the foreign population found itself in a de facto hostage situation, with the Katangans hoping that large numbers of foreign civilians in Kolwezi would prevent the FAZ from 'launching air raids or a major ground assault against the town.'⁵⁰⁶ Seemingly unaware of this threat, or perhaps precisely to provoke a response from his Western backers, Mobutu was the first to react to the fall of Kolwezi, however.

In an apparent display of his regime's virility and the FAZ's newfound resolve, Congo's president ordered a counteroffensive to retake Kolwezi. The rather foolhardy airdrop of a single FAZ Para-troop company on the 16th May, with further battalions on route on the ground from Kamina and Mutshatsha, was predictably

⁵⁰² Ross, 'Chronologie a détaillé de l'affaire de Kolwezi du 13 au 31 Mai 1978', 26 June 1978; Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Kinshasa, Ambassade, Carton 45, CADN

⁵⁰³ Memorandum for the White House: 'Katangans in Kapanga', 11th March 1977; President's Daily Report File, Box 1, NSA, JCL

⁵⁰⁴ Ross and Chouvet to de Guiringaud, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, 'Etude Sur les Événements de Kolwezi', 9th August 1978 ; Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Kinshasa, Ambassade, Carton 45, CADN

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ CIA, National Intelligence Daily Cable: Zaire Situation Report, 16th May 1978; CREST, NARAI

disastrous as the Katangan force simply picked off their outnumbered assailants.⁵⁰⁷ The ground offensive fared somewhat better as General Mahele recaptured the Kolwezi airport on the 17th May.⁵⁰⁸ Unfortunately, this rather limited success did nothing to secure the civilian population in Kolwezi itself. As Mobutu himself flew to the retaken airfield accompanied by reporters with a Mirage fighter demonstratively staging airstrikes in the background, the Katangans and their local recruits turned on black and white civilians suspected of loyalty to the regime. This begs the speculative question to what extent Mobutu factored the likely inadequacy of this offensive and the humanitarian implications for civilians in Kolwezi into his calculations in the hope of provoking a swifter and more substantial response from his Western allies?⁵⁰⁹

Whatever Mobutu's intentions with his own military foray, he was no doubt pleased by the Western reaction this actually precipitated. With the American Morrison-Knudsen employees safely evacuated on the 17th, the 82nd Airborne Division could stand down from its alerted status and Carter once more looked to a European lead on Congo's security. Eager for the Europeans to act, Carter responded to French and Belgian requests and approved eight C-141 planes to haul ammunition from Brussels to Kamina and ten C-141 transport plane to assist the French airlift to Congo; logistical support worth some thirteen million dollars.⁵¹⁰ The French '2^{ieme} Régiment Étranger de Parachutiste' (2nd REP- an airborne regiment in the French Foreign Legion) launched its Operation Leopard to retake Kolwezi on the 19th May and on the 20th May the Belgian Para-Commando Regiment began its rescue operation of the European population from Kamina airport in Congo under the code name 'Red Bean'.⁵¹¹ The results and implications of this extremely loose and disjointed Franco-Belgian coalition were threefold. Militarily,

⁵⁰⁷ Memorandum (no author given), 'Status of American Citizens in Kolwezi/Zairian Army Operations', 16th May 1978; Country File, Zaire, Box 87, NSA, JCL

⁵⁰⁸ Ross, 'Chronologie a détaillé de l'affaire de Kolwezi du 13 au 31 Mai 1978', 26 June 1978; Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Kinshasa, Ambassade, Carton 45, CADN;

Much of the details of the ensuing military operations cannot be found in the official record available thus far in the American archives. Based on various first hand accounts and the French military archives respectively, see Lt. Colonel Thomas P. Odom, *Shaba II: The French and Belgian Intervention in Zaire in 1978*; Nathaniel Kinsey Powell, *The "Cuba of the West": France and Mobutu's Zaire, 1977-79* (Unpublished paper given at LSE IDEAS Africa Department); Corroborated by contemporary news reports. *Washington Post* 1977-79; *Newsweek* 1977-79; *Time Magazine* 1977-79; *New York Times* (1977-79)

⁵⁰⁹ Thomas P. Odom implies this in his study of the military intervention. Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Memorandum from Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs David Aaron to General William E. Odom, SCC Working Group Meeting on Zaire, 19th May 1978; Subject File, Box 28, NSA, JCL

⁵¹¹ According to Odom the final name given to the operation was Operation Bonité. Lt. Colonel Thomas P. Odom, *Shaba II: The French and Belgian Intervention in Zaire in 1978* p. 33; See also Pierre Sergent, *La Légion Saute sur Kolwezi; Opération Léopard: Le 2e R.E.P. au Zaïre, Mai-Juin 1978* (Paris; Press de la Cite, 1978)

despite their lack of coordination and slightly divergent aims, the operation effectively evacuated the majority of the white civilian population by the 21st May and the Katangans withdrew back across the Angolan border and the operation drew to what was deemed a successful conclusion by the 26th May. At the same time, the humanitarian cost of the entire operation painted a bleaker picture. Some 150 white civilians perished and, while not featured as prominently on the pages of the Washington Post, a staggering estimated five hundred black civilians lost their lives in the ensuing reprisals. With the aims of the Belgian and French missions apparently divided between simply rescuing white expatriates and clearing Kolwezi from the Katangan forces respectively, the fate of the indigenous population appears to have been sadly neglected in the mandate of both.

From the point of view of the Carter administration, its immediate response to the Shaba crisis could be viewed with some satisfaction, however. American lives had been spared in the turmoil of Shaba II without having to deploy American troops. Indeed, while playing an important secondary role with its logistical (and by extension moral) support of the operations, once again Washington had secured a European lead in putting down spreading unrest in Congo's economic heartland.⁵¹² Overall, the Western media also viewed the intervention as a necessary and effective intervention responding to a humanitarian crisis. The Belgian government was criticised for its initially slow response but the French in particular received widespread public endorsement in the European and American press.⁵¹³ Indeed, this limited support for a largely European venture combined with its humanitarian justification appears to have resonated with the previously critical American media. A Washington Post editorial under the title 'The Right Policy on Zaire', for example, praised the American reaction of supplying eighteen transport planes to the Franco-Belgian intervention and offering twenty million dollars in 'non-lethal' aid to the Mobutu regime as 'on the money', as two thousand European lives were apparently threatened in Shaba.⁵¹⁴

Indeed, while the Katangans were ejected from Kolwezi easily enough and a semblance of order restored in May, as this editorial suggested the situation in Congo remained tenuous and the CIA warned that the departure of European

⁵¹² That the United States played an important role in the second Shaba intervention was noted by the French embassy. Ambassadeur Ross a Direction des Affaires Africaines et Malgaches, Paris, 'Dépêche d'Actualité', 2nd June 1978; Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Kinshasa, Ambassade, Carton 45, CADN

⁵¹³ Memorandum for Aaron, Situation Room, Evening Notes: 'Media Reaction to the Shaba Situation', 22nd May 1978; President's Daily Report File, Box 5, NSA, JCL; Pierre Lellouche and Dominique Moisi, 'French Policy in Africa: A Lonely Battle against Destabilisation' in *International Security* (Spring 1979) pp. 124-5

⁵¹⁴ Editorial, 'The Right Policy on Zaire', *Washington Post* 21st May 1978, p. B6

troops would most likely see Shaba slip once more into violence.⁵¹⁵ Despite their initial reticence and limited rescue mandate, it was the Belgian para-commandos who remained in Congo on an interim basis until July while a more permanent solution to Congo's security crisis was sought.⁵¹⁶ As a result, policymakers in Washington, Paris and Brussels were frantically considering a more sustainable strategy for Congo. The more medium term response to the renewed crisis was to address both Congo's military and economic deficits while at the same time calling once more for economic, political and social reform of the Mobutu regime.

Already during the closing stages of the intervention Belgium and France began to petition for an international African peacekeeping force combined with economic assistance package to revive their ailing ally.⁵¹⁷ On the 26th May Brzezinski convened the SCC (Special Coordination Committee) to discuss the 'overall approach to the Zairian problem' and the role the United States might play in such a venture ahead of a private meeting between President Carter and the French President Giscard d'Estaing, visiting the US to attend a special UN session on disarmament. Brzezinski's summary of the SCC deliberations conveys considerable angst over any deepening American commitments in Congo. Nevertheless, despite his scepticism the National Security Adviser went on to describe the SCC's shared view that the United States could simply not afford to ignore Congo's threatening demise,

'Despite the poor prospects for significant reform, there was a general SCC consensus led by State that Zaire is too important and the global stakes too high for the United States to continue its past posture of marginal support... The alternative of not participating in this effort would probably lead to rapid economic collapse and political fragmentation of the country.'⁵¹⁸

As a result, the SCC recommended that the president signal a willingness for the United States to participate in the multinational development program, under the auspices of the 'Mobutu Plan' for reform, and to share part of the burden of an international force for Congo by once more providing airlift capabilities. Again, a strong desire for the United States to play a subordinate role to its European allies in this effort was reiterated. Nevertheless, the US role in these efforts remained

⁵¹⁵ Odom to Aaron, 'SCC Working Group Meeting on Zaire', 22nd May 1978; NLC 2, CREST, JCL

⁵¹⁶ Once again the United States played an important behind-the-scenes contribution as further C-141 airlifts delivered additional spare parts, fuel handling gear and the loan of a communications truck to Kamina airport in support of the continuing Belgian operation. Aaron, Memorandum for Secretaries of State, Defense and Director of Central Intelligence: 'Belgian Request for Additional Support in Zaire', 24th May 1978; NLC 2, CREST, JCL

⁵¹⁷ Brzezinski to Carter, 23rd May 1978; President's Daily Report File, Box 5, NSA, JCL

⁵¹⁸ Brzezinski to Carter, 'Next Steps in Zaire', 26th May 1978; Subject File, Box 28, NSA, JCL

critical and in May 1978 the Carter administration was once more rallying to Mobutu's side as the United States not only contributed to a rapid military intervention in Shaba but also committed to a broader security and development plan for Congo under European auspices.

In the realm of security, the French were again the key to enlisting support from its francophone African allies to this effect. As a result, David Newsom, now as Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, travelled to Paris to discuss the details of these operations on the first weekend of June. In his briefing to the president, Brzezinski outlined his limited mandate as follows, 'Newsom is going with guidance reflecting your desire to keep the Europeans in the lead, rely on African troops, and keep us in a backstopping role not including troops.'⁵¹⁹ Details gradually emerged of a renewed Moroccan commitment of 1,500 troops and contributions from Senegal, Togo, Gabon and the Ivory Coast bringing the force up to some 2,500 and giving the venture a more 'pan-African' appearance.⁵²⁰ By June 9th, Brzezinski exclaimed that he had finally received a full exposition of French requirements for the airlift of the Inter African Force (IAF) and was able to communicate to the French Foreign Minister, Jean François-Poncet, that twenty-five C-141 and C-5 transport plane sorties in support of this effort had been approved. With a mandate to remain for a year initially, while French and Belgian military advisers set about another training program to improve the capacity of the FAZ, it appeared that the arrival of the IAF that July had resolved Mobutu's most immediate security fears, at least on his Shaban flank.⁵²¹ The willingness of the Carter administration to simply follow an opaque French lead illustrates Washington's emphasis on Congolese stability.

This security effort alone, however, could not ensure Mobutu's survival as Congo's dire economic straits had been further exacerbated by the damage inflicted upon Kolwezi's mining operations during the recent upheavals. Even if his creditors ignored Congo's non-compliance with the past two IMF stabilization plans and continued financing as previously agreed, according to US officials the combined cost of the loss of earnings from Kolwezi's mines and their reconstruction over the following two to three months was estimated at some one hundred and fifty million

⁵¹⁹ Brzezinski to Carter, 'Mini-SCC Meeting on Zaire', 2nd June 1978; NLC 2, CREST, JCL

⁵²⁰ Thornton to Aaron, 'O'Neil Briefing', 5th June 1978; Subject File, Box CO67, WHCF, JCL; Milton R. Benjamin, 'Morocco will send Troops to help Zaire' *Washington Post*, 3rd June 1978, p. A1

⁵²¹ UPI reported that France and Belgium would train a 15,000-man elite strike force for the FAZ on 12th June 1978. Two 'North-South: Evening Reports' from Thornton to Brzezinski, 12th June and 21st June 1978; NLC 24, CREST, JCL

dollars.⁵²² Under French and Belgian auspices, the international donor community of the IMF, Paris Club and various commercial banks were cajoled into continued support at multilateral donor meetings in Paris on 5th June and Brussels on the 13th-14th June and again on 9th-10th November. Again following the lead of its European partner, the United States remained instrumental in ensuring Congo's continued financial viability. As such, despite tight budget constraints imposed by Congress, the Washington agreed to a further thirty-six million dollar food, security and development assistance for 1979 and 1980- an important gesture to shore up donor confidence by signalling continued American support.⁵²³ Thus, on November 17th Brzezinski cabled the Paris embassy with some satisfaction noting, 'While not making any specific commitments for new aid, the IMF appears to have been satisfied that it had generated enough information on assistance flows to allow resumption of planning for the standby agreement loan.'⁵²⁴

These economic and security arrangements were not, however, to be entirely without conditions and the final aspect of the Western rescue package in 1978 was a renewed call for reform of the bedraggled Mobutu regime. Here the United States took the lead in cajoling the Five Power (United States, France, Belgian, Western Germany and Britain) meeting in Paris to agree to a concerted demarche that June by their respective ambassadors in Kinshasa to press Mobutu on his economic and political reform program along the lines of the IMF stabilization measures and the Mobutu Plan that envisioned placing foreign experts in key positions at the Central Bank, Ministry of Finance and Customs, as well as pledging a greater devolution of political power.⁵²⁵ Of course, with its policies during the second Shaba crisis once more under scrutiny, the domestic political case for reform of its Congolese ally was compelling from the Washington administration's point of view. The initial airlift in support of the French and Belgian operations, while couched in terms of a humanitarian rescue mission, had already sparked some congressional debate over the applicability of the War Powers Act and representatives of the Congressional Black Caucus wrote a letter to President Carter warning against a resumption of

⁵²² 'Cost of Zairian Stabilization and Recovery' (no author/date given); General Odom File, Box 61, NSA, JCL

⁵²³ The British delegation at the Brussels Conference on Zaire noted the dual purpose of their American counterparts in both touting reform while eager to ensure continued credit for Congo. Maurice to Winpenny, 'Some Economic Aspects on the Brussels Conference on Zaire', 17th November 1978 and 'Opening Statements of the United States, 9th November, 1978; both in FCO 31/2305, IMF/IBRD in Zaire

⁵²⁴ Brzezinski to American Embassy, Paris, 'Briefing Material for Senator Percy', 17th November 1978; NLC 2, CREST, JCL

⁵²⁵ Letter from Carter to Mobutu, 11th June 1978 (to be transmitted via Kinshasa Embassy after 5 Power Ambassador Demarche); NLC 16, CREST, JCL

clandestine activity in Angola and restating their support of the Clark Amendment prohibiting this.⁵²⁶ As a result, the Carter White House was under constant pressure to justify any further involvement in Congolese affairs along the lines of the country's much needed rehabilitation. The talking points prepared by Lannon Walker for Brzezinski's conversation with the French Foreign Minister stressed exactly this conditionality of further US support, 'There is no way we can sustain our commitment to Zaire, or our support for European efforts, if we are not able to persuade Congress that fundamental reforms have been undertaken by Mobutu.'⁵²⁷

To dismiss the American rallying cry for reform of its ally of old simply as cynical domestic politicking is perhaps overstating the case, however. Again, the issue of the internal dynamics of the Mobutu regime very much formed an integral part of the Carter administration's deliberations. As such the SCC meeting on the 26th May 1978 discussed earlier already reflected a consensus, 'that any US contribution to such a program (economic assistance, debt rescheduling and assistance to the IAF) would depend on significant reforms – many of which Mobutu has already pledged to undertake.'⁵²⁸ In addition to the Five Power Demarche, the United States also launched a diplomatic drive of its own to maintain pressure on the Congolese president. As such, ambassador Cutler continued to press for reform in Kinshasa and this constituted the central subject of Secretary Vance's consultations with Congo's Foreign Minister Uamba in Washington on 4th October as well as during Assistant Secretary of State Dick Moose and ambassador Don McHenry's mission to Congo that November.⁵²⁹ Most notable, however, was the tenor taken by President Carter personally.

Breaking with the aloofness from Congo's internal problems of his predecessors, Carter responded to Mobutu's message of thanks for continued American assistance with a long letter that both reiterated Mobutu's public pledges and stressed in some detail the need for economic and political reform. Carter went on to 'speak frankly... between friends...' by addressing the poor human rights record of the Mobutu regime directly, writing,

⁵²⁶ Herbert J. Hansell (State Department Legal Adviser), June 16th 1978 explained why War Powers Act did not apply to a US 'transport operation...more than 100 miles from the combat zone'; Letter from Charles C. Diggs and Darren J. Mitchell (Chairman of Congressional Black Caucus), 27th May 1978; both in Country File, Zaire, Box 87, NSA, JCL

⁵²⁷ Walker, Talking Points for Use with Francois-Poncet, 1st June 1978; Vertical Files, Box 115, JCL

⁵²⁸ Brzezinski to Carter, Memorandum: 'Next Steps in Zaire', 26th May 1978; Subject File, Box 28, NSA, JCL

⁵²⁹ US Delegation in NY to Secretary of State, Secretary's Bilateral with Foreign Minister Uamba, October 5th, 6th October 1978; NLC 16, CREST, JCL; Vance to Carter, 27th November 1978; Subject File, Box 39, Plains File, JCL

'I realize full well the enormous challenge that bringing unity to the nation of Zaire presents and I know that American norms cannot be transplanted. At the same time, you must know that I cannot continue significant assistance if corrupt elements continue to be associated in the public mind with your government. Our ambassador will be prepared to discuss specific allegations with you if you desire. Also, support will be most difficult if the pattern of arrests and executions we have witnessed continues.'⁵³⁰

Of course, the issue of maintaining Congressional support played a part in Carter's demarche but it is nonetheless noteworthy that for the first time in US-Congolese relations an American president directly confronted Mobutu personally on his domestic record. With such high-level engagement, the question remains why this reformist drive failed to have greater impact on the direction taken in Kinshasa?

The two Shaba interventions and the renewed economic bailout demonstrated the dependence of the Mobutu regime on his foreign backers for its continued survival, as the French embassy noted.⁵³¹ There are three principal reasons why this considerable leverage did not translate into an effective reform of its beneficiary, however. First of all, Mobutu's intransigence on his domestic front would again prove a major stumbling block as the wily Congolese leader did his utmost to ward off unwanted 'meddling' in the summer of 1978. He publicly rejected any conditionality of the aid received as infringements of Congo's sovereignty and even temporarily fended off the Paris Five ambassadors by retreating to the north of the country and not receiving visitors.⁵³² To move the Kinshasa regime would therefore require a united front and Brzezinski himself concluded his suggested talking points for the president's meeting with his French counterpart in May 1978 with the sage warning, 'The key to success of any endeavour is going to be close cooperation among us. Mobutu will exploit any differences in our positions.'⁵³³ The second notable failure of this reformist drive therefore, despite their efforts for a joint demarche, was the disunity amongst the Paris Five in how to induce compliance from Congo's intractable dictator.

The uncoordinated and divergent approaches of Brussels and Paris were already apparent during the Kolwezi intervention, perhaps reflecting their respective levels of support for Mobutu personally. Indeed, a hint of exasperation

⁵³⁰ Letter from Carter to Mobutu, 11th June 1978; NLC 16, CREST, JCL

⁵³¹ Ross à Direction des Affaires Africaines et Malgaches, Paris, 'Dépêche d'Actualité', 2nd June 1978; Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Kinshasa, Ambassade, Carton 45, CADN

⁵³² Vance to Carter, June 12th 1978; NLC 2, CREST, JCL

⁵³³ Brzezinski to Carter, 26th May 1978; President's Daily Report File, Box 17, NSA, JCL

can be noted in French Ambassador Ross's account of the Belgian reluctance to side with Mobutu personally in the Kolwezi operations and unwillingness to involve itself in Congo's domestic affairs as he wrote from Kinshasa, 'Cette attitude procédait des réticences à s'engager aux côtés du Général Mobutu.'⁵³⁴ Conversely, while well aware of the shortcomings of the Kinshasa regime, the French were reluctant to pin this on Mobutu personally and Ross wrote, 'Mais, quelles qu'aient été les fautes d'un homme, on ne peut le charger de tous les péchés du Zaïre: de ce pays sous-développé, au seuil du quart-monde, trop vaste, sans véritables structures...'⁵³⁵ As such, perhaps reflecting French desires to guard their close ties with the incumbent Kinshasa despot, Washington was frustrated by their reluctant ally to actually confront President Mobutu. NSC Staffer Thornton commented to Brzezinski that June, 'The French are pretty clearly putting a monkey wrench in our plans for strong pressure on Mobutu.'⁵³⁶ Indeed, Thornton even speculated that the French might leak a copy of Carter's letter to Mobutu before it had reached its intended target and derailing the entire process, such was American confidence in their French allies. Nor were the French the only obstacle to a united drive for reform in Congo and, following the Paris Five Demarche to Mobutu in June 1978, the US embassy in Kinshasa reported its distinct impression that their counterparts, 'have been relatively gentle with Mobutu and have let us carry the main burden of delivering the hard line'.⁵³⁷ The Kinshasa despot was thus left to exploit the chinks in the Western position just as Brzezinski had warned.

Less obvious, however, is why the United States did not convert its leverage both on the Mobutu regime and its European partners to bring their joint Congo endeavours in line with its stated modernising intentions? In fact, even as Mobutu's resistance and European vacillations were becoming increasingly apparent, Washington offered logistical support to the IAF force, agreed to a renewed financial bailout and continued to offer as much aid to the Kinshasa regime as Congress would tolerate. At least part of the explanation for the weakness of the American position can be found in Washington's shifting rhetorical approach to its Congo dilemma. Indeed, despite its apparent commitment to pressuring Mobutu,

⁵³⁴ Ross and Chouvet to de Guiringaud, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, *Étude Sur les Événements de Kolwezi* 9th August 1978; Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Kinshasa, Ambassade, Carton 45, CADN; For an elaboration on the Belgian motivations and reluctance to support Mobutu personally see Gauthier de Villers, *De Mobutu à Mobutu: Trente Ans de Relations Belgique-Zaïre* (Brussels: De Boeck University, 1995)

⁵³⁵ Ross to Direction des Affaires Africaines et Malgaches, Paris, 'Dépêche d'Actualité', 2nd June 1978; Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Kinshasa, Ambassade, Carton 45, CADN

⁵³⁶ Thornton to Brzezinski, North-South: Evening Reports, 13th June 1978; NLC 10, CREST, JCL

⁵³⁷ Henry Richardson (NSC) to Brzezinski, International Organizations: Evening Report, 21st June 1978; NLC 10, CREST, JCL

Carter was never able to free himself from the more traditional Cold War complex of his predecessors and it was this paradox that ultimately doomed this reformist drive to failure. This transformation of the official public American position marked the final aspect of the failure to reform the Kinshasa regime as it clearly played into Mobutu's hands who had long lambasted a supposed Soviet-Cuban grand design behind the unrest he faced in Shaba.

While the justification for continued assistance of Congo's leader in times of crisis remained constant, as has been seen, US officials notably resisted any public endorsement of Mobutu's claims of Soviet-Cuban meddling during the first Shaba crisis and shied away from any potential escalation of this local crisis along such lines. The resurgence of violence in Shaba the following year saw this cautious approach cast into the wind as the State Department almost immediately denounced the supposed Cuban role in training and equipping the invading Katangan force. Furthermore, President Carter himself took the lead in publicly lambasting the Soviet-Cuban militarism in Africa. During a Chicago press conference the following week on the 25th May, just as the US-French-Belgian operations in Shaba were coming to a close, the president criticised Angola and Cuba for their apparent roles in the Katangan invasion.

Describing the Cubans as Soviet proxies, he went on to dismiss any deliberate policy of 'Linkage' while betraying considerable ambivalence in response to a question on the subject as he denounced the Soviet human rights record and concluded, '... and unless they show some constraints on their own involvement in Africa and on their sending Cuban troops to be involved in Africa, it will make it much more difficult to conclude a SALT agreement and to have it ratified once it is written.' The warning entailed the above statement was clear and constituted a much more confrontational line over Africa from the White House. Indeed, this shift was not lost on its audience as Walt Rogers of the Associated Press commented, 'It was just about a year ago at Notre Dame University you told Americans it was time to end their inordinate concern and alarm with communism. You seem to have fallen into that same preoccupation in Africa.'⁵³⁸ In other words, by the time of the second Shaba crisis Carter had seemingly reverted to the all too familiar line that communist aggression lurked behind Congo's domestic troubles. By extension, casting any setbacks for Mobutu's regime as a gain for America's Cold War rivals made it that much more difficult to curb his domestic transgressions effectively.

⁵³⁸ The President's News Conference, Chicago Illinois, 25th May 1978, *The American Presidency Project* (www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=30852); See also John M. Goshko, 'Carter Accuses Cuba on Zaire Raid', *Washington Post* 26th May 1978, A1

The basis for this about turn Carter's finger pointing over the alleged Cuban role in Congo's Shaba troubles is puzzling for a number of reasons. American statements were careful not to accuse Cuba of an actual combat role in the occupation of Kolwezi, as there was no evidence to support such claims.⁵³⁹ The wider assertion that Cuba had facilitated the invasion by training and equipping FNLC recruits in the past would be harder to counter due to their cooperation during the Angolan crisis. Of course, both Carter and his team failed to mention the inherent reciprocity of these alleged actions, if confirmed, with Mobutu's continued assistance to FNLA and UNITA in their on going campaign against Angola. Furthermore, if past involvement with the Katangans could serve as an indictment, Washington might as well consider their early partnership with Belgium during the secessionist years of the early 1960s, as Castro himself was quick to point out.⁵⁴⁰

More remarkable still was the administrations conduct towards Cuba during the Shaba turmoil. Following the creation of the US Interest Section in Havana (USINT) the previous year, Castro now used this as a sounding board during the Shaba crisis. Already on the 17th May, Castro called the American Chief of Mission, Lyle Lane, to his office to categorically deny any direct or indirect Cuban, Angolan or Soviet involvement in the outbreak of violence. In stressing that Cuba was neither supplying weapons, training the FNLC nor in fact had any contact with the Katangans; Castro explained that, 'Cuba has adopted this position because it does not consider Katangan incursions into Zaire desirable from any standpoint and specifically not conducive to good relations among the nations of black Africa or to the peaceful development of Angola,' and that Cuba was reluctant to give either Congo or its allies any excuse for renewed violence with its southern neighbour.⁵⁴¹ This was very close to the arguments used by the CIA in rejecting Mobutu's allegations of Cuban involvement in the 1977 Katangan incursion. Nevertheless, the response from Washington on this occasion was much more confrontational.

Not only did Carter publicly reject Castro's assertions as has been noted, but the State Department also leaked the Cuban leader's confidential consultations with USINT in Havana. Castro and Lane appeared equally disgruntled over Washington's abuse of their very first substantive talks. The American Chief of Mission reprimanded the State Department as follows,

⁵³⁹ Letter from Frank Moose, Assistant to the President for Congressional Liaison to the Honorable Millicent Fenwick, 14th August 1978; Country File, Zaire, Box 87, NSA, JCL

⁵⁴⁰ Lane, Havana to Secretary of State, 'Fidel Castro Denies Cuban Involvement in Shaba', 18th May 1978; Powell Press, Box 55, Staff Offices, JCL

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

'I am of course deeply distressed by indications that my conversation with Castro has been leaked to the press. At the outset of the conversation, Castro said that he had chosen to see me very quietly since he did not want to read about it in the newspapers. I did not think it necessary to include that comment in my reporting cable. Assuming the leak did not originate from the Cubans, this development could have obviously adverse effects on my relations with the GOC, and it measurably reduces the likelihood that I might have any further contact on substantive matters with Castro.'⁵⁴²

The fact that Washington utterly failed to engage Castro's opening on the Katangan issue and so readily risked any improvement in its relations with Cuba suggests a mass of evidence implicating Cuban aggression on Congo's borders. Indeed, by mid-June 1978, in response to Congressional probing the CIA had produced a dossier citing over thirty-five sources confirming the Cuban links with the Katangans, according to a Newsweek article. This evidence, included radio intercepts, accounts of training basis in Angola and photos of Cuban weapons found amongst captured Katangas, apparently convinced much of Congress including the Senator Howard Baker, the Republican leader, and House Speaker Thomas ('Tip') O'Neill. One administration insider who had access to the full record was quoted as saying, 'If you took it to a jury, you'd get a 12 to 0 vote.'⁵⁴³

The actual French and American records available tell a very different story, however. Throughout both Shaba crises, the French embassy and military mission in Congo most consistently blamed Angolan and Cuban (and, more speculatively, East German) influences directing the Katangan forces.⁵⁴⁴ Indeed, Ambassador Ross's autopsy of events saw Cuban transgressions at the heart of galvanising renewed Western involvement and the American media picked up on these French claims.⁵⁴⁵ The foundations of these assertions were decidedly shaky, however, as they pointed to little more than a second-hand account of two Katangan prisoners and some supposed radio intercepts.⁵⁴⁶ Actual evidence of Cubans in Shaba

⁵⁴² Lane, Havana to Secretary of State, 19th May 1978; Powell Press, Box 55, Staff Offices, JCL

⁵⁴³ Raymond Carroll, 'What Did Cuba Do?' *Newsweek* 12th June 1978, p. 32

⁵⁴⁴ For Example, Colonel Bommier (French Attaché des Forces Armées in Kinshasa) without citing actual evidence placed the Cubans firmly at the heart of the first Katangan invasion of Shaba already in April 1977 in his report to the French Chief of Staff, 'Rapport de Renseignement Bimestriel, Avril- Mai 1977'; Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Kinshasa, Ambassade, Carton 45, CADN

⁵⁴⁵ Ross to Direction des Affaires Africaines et Malgaches, Paris, 'Dépêche d'Actualité', 2nd June 1978; Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Kinshasa, Ambassade, Carton 45, CADN;

For Example: David B. Ottaway, 'French, Belgians Get All Whites out of Zaire City' *Washington Post* 22nd May 1978, A1; Raymond Carroll, 'What Did Cuba Do?' *Newsweek* 12th June 1978, p. 32

⁵⁴⁶ It is unclear whether the radio intercepts were made by the French themselves or passed on by the FAZ; Ambassador Ross, 'Présentation a la Presse de deux Prisonniers Katangais' 22nd April; CADN- Ministre des Affaires Étrangères-Kinshasa-Ambassade- Carton 45

remained illusive. Similarly, in a memorandum evaluating Castro's denials, the CIA in turn also cited a conversation between Newsweek journalist Arnaud de Borchgrave and two wounded Katangans reporting the presence of two ranking Cuban advisors at a training base in Angola on the 2nd May ahead of the Kolwezi operation.⁵⁴⁷ This unverifiable third-hand information was apparently backed up by South African Foreign Minister Botha's claim of a 'very reliable source' informing of some two thousand Katangans being trained by Cubans in north-eastern Angola. Like Mobutu, however, the South African and French governments clearly had strong ulterior motives for couching the turmoil in Shaba in Cold War terms in the hope of securing further US involvement in Congo and Angola. Perhaps the strongest evidence, then, came from an apparent statement from an FNLC leader by the name of Nathaniel Mbumba. In a document that unfortunately remains heavily sanitised, the CIA reported Mbumba's allegations that 'Angola and Cuba had been helping the insurgents, particularly with Arms and training.' This report went on to state that two Cuban and six Angolan advisors accompanied the rebels when they started towards Kolwezi in early May and that 'Cuban military advisers had... coordinated closely in the planning of the invasion.'⁵⁴⁸ Soviet and East German personnel were also engaged in FNLC training in Angola, it continued. As such, Mbumba's claims gave a degree of credence to an otherwise circumstantial case and it was precisely this last source, Secretary Vance cited in his conversation with his Soviet counterpart, Foreign Minister Gromyko, in the immediate aftermath of the crisis to support Carter's public condemnation.⁵⁴⁹

Gromyko for his part simply dismissed this as a campaign of disinformation. Indeed, considerable gaps remained in the case for the Cuban involvement in the Shaba crisis. From the now accessible East German government records, it seems clear that it played no active role in supporting the FNLC during the Shaba crisis and it remained nonplussed over claims to the contrary.⁵⁵⁰ Gleijeses' analysis of the Cuban archives draws a similar conclusion.⁵⁵¹ Even the contemporary record available in Washington in May 1978, however, undermined the reasoning of the Carter administration. That both French and Mobutu's assertions of a direct Soviet-

⁵⁴⁷ CIA Memorandum, 'Shaba, Castro and the Evidence', 6th June 1978; NLC 24, CREST, JCL

⁵⁴⁸ all taken from Ibid.

⁵⁴⁹ Record of the main Content of the Conversation between Soviet Foreign Minister A. A. Gromyko and US Secretary of State Vance, 31st May 1978 in New York (Excerpts regarding Africa); Vertical Files, Box 115, JCL

⁵⁵⁰ Aktenvermerk, Gespräch Stellvertreters des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Dr. Klaus Willerding, mit Botschafter Bolelala Wa Boende, 3. Mai 1977; Mikrofiche C6256, MfAA, DDR

⁵⁵¹ Piero Gleijeses, *Truth or Credibility: Castro, Carter, and the Invasion of Shaba* in *International History Review* 18 (February 1996); pp. 70-103

Cuban role in the attack on Kolwezi lacked hard evidence was quickly conceded by the administration following further questions from individual Congressmen.⁵⁵² Moreover, the accusation made by Carter that the Cubans must have known of Katangan plans and failed to give due warning, signalling a degree of collusion at least, cannot be taken at face value. In fact, quite the opposite was true. Cuba did in fact issue a startlingly early warning over Katangan activity when Havana's officials approached Belgian diplomats in Brussels already in February, cautioning over troop movements across the Zambian border signalling an impending attack on Shaba. Anne Cox Chambers, the American ambassador to Brussels, reported her conviction that the Cubans wanted this intelligence to be passed on to the United States. Of course, this may have been nothing more than a ruse to cover the tracks of Cuban involvement in the actual operations that broke out several months later.⁵⁵³ Perhaps Castro was simply covering his tracks but the fact remains, however, that this intriguing piece of the puzzle was entirely omitted from the very public allegations over Cuban collusion in Katanga the following May. In other words, not only did the Carter administration lack hard evidence over Cuban involvement in Congo but it also ignored an apparent effort by the Cubans to engage the West on security issues on the Angolan-Congolese border.

Whether this indicates a wilfully duplicitous use of evidence to challenge Cuban gains in Africa, or simply reflects a sincere inability to imagine that Cuba might not be pulling the strings in a venture originating in Angola is difficult to assess. The above-cited CIA report indicated the latter as it concluded,

'It is impossible to believe that the Cubans had no part in the plans or training or foreknowledge of the attack in a country in which: A) there are 5,000 Cuban civilian advisers filling top managerial and technical positions; B) They are developing a national education system, running public health service, assisting in the coffee and sugar harvest and reconstructing roads and bridges destroyed during the civil war.'⁵⁵⁴

The French line followed a similar trail of thought from the beginning of the Shaban troubles in 1977 and even the sceptical British embassy ascribed some Cuban

⁵⁵² Letter from Frank Moose, Assistant to the President for Congressional Liaison to the Honorable Millicent Fenwick, 14th August 1978; JCL- Brzezinski Material- Country File- Box 87

⁵⁵³ Memorandum for Brzezinski, Situation Room: Evening Notes; 'Reports of Impending Activity in Zaire', 9th February, 1978; President's Daily Report File, Box 8, NSA, JCL

⁵⁵⁴ CIA Memorandum, 'Evidence of Cuban Involvement in Training FNLC Forces' (Undated); CREST, NARAI

collusion in the planning of the incursion.⁵⁵⁵ On the other hand, Castro's reasoning for avoiding any role in Shaba closely correlated to that of the CIA during the 1977 crisis and it is difficult to see what had changed on the ground in Congo and Angola to now prompt renewed Cuban meddling. Indeed, perhaps the biggest variable between the two crises was simply the resurgent activities of communist powers in the Horn and elsewhere in Africa contributing to an increased overall nervousness in Washington over perceived Soviet-Cuban gains on the continent.

The catastrophe of Kissinger's Angola fiasco had only heightened American concerns over Soviet-Cuban intentions in Africa, as the previous chapter has discussed. Despite Carter's avowed intent to transcend these Cold War confines in his dealings with the Third World, his administration no doubt shared these fears as the outbreak of violence in the Horn saw further Soviet-Cuban gains on the continent. In part, these anxieties perhaps reflected domestic political considerations, and Newsweek quoted an administration insider saying, 'Since the Carter Administration came to power, the number of red blotches all over the map of Africa has increased dramatically... That gives the Republicans enormous political advantages for 1978 and 1980.' These fears were not entirely without foundation, however, and the article went on,

"The "red blotches" were spreading steadily. From Ethiopia, there were reports last week of a large, new offensive by the Marxist government against rebels in the province of Eritrea. U.S. officials said that Cuban troops were present in the area, although they were not yet involved in the fighting. In Rhodesia, fighting continued between the new, multiracial government and guerrillas supported by Russia and Cuba.'⁵⁵⁶

As such, a Policy Review Memorandum (PRM 36) prepared by the NSC in response to Vance's request that April highlighted the sincerity of these growing concerns over the Soviet-Cuban presence in Africa. This document pointed to some 60,000 civilian and military personnel between the two communist countries scattered across Africa, with the Soviets represented in thirty-five countries and the Cubans in thirteen, and went to explore their differing 'harmonious but not synonymous' objectives. As such, it contrasted Cuban policy, born out of 'its activist, revolutionary and almost messianic zeal to diminish US and other Western influence in the Third World,' to the Soviet agenda in Southern Africa as essentially

⁵⁵⁵ Ross, 'Le Zaïre, Le Bloc Soviétique et les Événements du Shaba' 8th April 1977; Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Kinshasa, Ambassade, Carton 45, CADN; Ambassador Donald, Kinshasa to David Owen, FCO, London, 'Last Chance for Mobutu', 9th June 1978; FCO 99/162, Cuba/Zaire Shaba Relations, Kew

⁵⁵⁶ Susan Fraker, 'Toughening in Africa' in *Newsweek* 29th May 1978, p. 20

'a case by case exploitation of targets of opportunity arising from the collapse of the Portuguese empire and the racial and colonial tensions in southern Africa.' This opportunistic characterisation led the report to conclude that the Soviet Union could be expected to focus its efforts on Angola, Ethiopia and the Rhodesian nationalists while responding to unpredictable events such as a change of regime in a given country as they arose. As such, Congo continued to present an inviting target for Soviet subversion, at least through the Washington prism, and the report concluded, 'Over the long term, they probably consider Zaire and Southern Africa as having the greatest potential for successful Soviet intervention.'⁵⁵⁷ In other words, the Carter administration not only remained transfixed by traditional Cold War paradigms in its approach to Congo, but its shifting rhetorical approach also ultimately recast a relatively parochial crisis in terms of a broad East-West rivalry.

It is worth noting that, following considerable conformity over the American Congo line during Shaba I, by 1978 some dissident voices within the Carter administration were finally emerging. Ambassador to the United Nations Andrew Young, oft cited as the champion of a more regionalist approach to Africa, spoke out over the dangers of the American reliance on a European lead in dealing with Congo. Unfortunately, a copy of the cable voicing these concerns in early June 1978 remains unavailable as the State Department material for this period awaits declassification. Nevertheless, the views entailed therein were summarised in a report for Brzezinski by Thomas Thornton as follows,

'A cable from Andy Young sets forth his belief that the further we go in the French-Belgian effort to meet critical problems in Shaba/Zaire, the more we risk polarization that will hurt us in Africa. An international force for Shaba risks a deep split in the OAU. Western backing for both the force and the economic salvage job risks confrontation with most of those who oppose Mobutu in Africa, and with their bloc supporters- giving an East-West cast to the reaction. Because there appears to be no alternative to swift action, the African force contemplated by the French appears to be the best we can hope for at the moment. However, we must distance ourselves from French leadership in Africa. Young urges consideration of a dramatic US statement that calls for a truly international responsibility for the problems of central Africa.'⁵⁵⁸

Of course, it is impossible to know from this to what extent Thornton coloured Young's representation with his own views but, while accurately gauging the

⁵⁵⁷ NSC Policy Review Memorandum 36: 'Soviet Cuban Presence in Africa, Present and Potential', 25th April 1978; RG 59, P9, Records of Anthony Lake, 1977-81, Box 17, NARAI

⁵⁵⁸ Thornton to Brzezinski, North-South: Evening Report, 6th June 1978; NLC 10, CREST, JCL

dangers for the American image in Africa, this did not go very far in proposing an alternative strategy for dealing with Congo and the need for joining the Franco-Belgian security plans appear to have remained unchallenged.

A more controversial attack on the American role in Congo came from a former political counsellor of the US embassy in Kinshasa, Robert Remole, and remains entirely absent from the declassified official record. According to a Washington Post report, this whistle-blower claimed that ambassador Cutler deliberately suppressed his reports on Mobutu's human rights abuses over a period of two years and that, following his urging for Washington to cease its assistance to the Kinshasa regime and permit it to 'fall of its own corruption and inefficiency'⁵⁵⁹, he was forced into early retirement. Again, it is necessary to await the full release of the State Department records to gauge the veracity of his claims and how far Remole went in actually proposing an alternative American policy towards Congo. It is worth noting, however, that Cutler himself urged a distancing from Mobutu personally and Mobutu's transgressions were well known in Washington even if Remole's reports were suppressed.

Perhaps most surprising was the scepticism voiced by Brzezinski's own military advisor, Lt. General William E. Odom, over the efficacy of continuing support of the Mobutu regime just as the Franco-Belgian intervention in Shaba was coming to a close. Rather than concern over Mobutu's domestic record, however, this criticism was based on the limited chance of success of such a course, comparing assistance plans to Congo in the wake of Shaba II with the CORDS program during the Vietnam War. As such he warned against the introduction of foreign technicians in the Congo government as a form of colonialism that would lead to 'de facto if not de jure corruption' of American and European officials, as had been the case in Vietnam. He was equally scathing over the announced decentralisation of the government in a country where the elite in the capital struggled to enforce its will in the provinces. Just as dubious were the prospects of success of the planned military reforms and the retraining of 'backward populations in military organisations.' While perhaps coloured by a degree of racial prejudice, Odom did seem to correctly identify the difficulty of successfully affecting a change in the Mobutu regime. His prescription, however, was far from flawless. In the short term, he agreed to the need for the Franco-Belgian and IAF security operations in Congo. Beyond this, Odom surmised,

⁵⁵⁹ Dusko Doder, 'People of Zaire Direct Suppressed Anger at Mobutu; US Diplomat Charges Cables were Ignored' *Washington Post* 30th December 1979, A1

‘For the long run, we should make it clear that we will not underwrite anybody’s internal security problems. At the same time we should focus less on Zaire, Shaba, Katangans and Angola and rather put our efforts on the Cubans and Soviets. We have to make it costly for them, and there is no way we can make it costly for them by committing resources in Zaire or Angola.’

This logic is a little baffling as the more events in Congo were couched in terms of an East-West confrontation, the less free Washington would be to drop the intransigent Mobutu and risk the collapse of a regime that would be interpreted as another Cold War loss in Africa. As such, while warning over potential pitfalls of specific aspects of the emerging American response to the Congo turmoil, none of the above critiques went very far in suggesting a coherent alternative to the policies pursued.⁵⁶⁰

To conclude this section, while the desire to discredit Castro’s Africa policies was understandable, there was something illogical about this resurgence in Cold War rhetoric in Washington’s approach to Congo. Just as in 1977, the Carter White House responded to spreading violence in Shaba by offering material military assistance to a European lead in repulsing the Katangan attack on Kolwezi. Furthermore, with Western economic interests more directly threatened and white lives at risk that May, the United States increased the stakes of its involvement by supplying direct airlift capabilities to the French and Belgian forces. The fact that this could be couched in terms of a necessary humanitarian rescue no doubt made for a less agonising decision and strengthened American resolve. Neither Washington officials nor the press commented on the fact that no effort was ever made to contact or negotiate with the Katangan force. That the ensuing violence against civilians in Kolwezi appears to have been a direct consequence of a botched FAZ operation and frustration at a renewed Western rescue of the entrenched Kinshasa despot was also omitted from public debate. By now it was abundantly clear that Mobutu had failed to make significant progress towards reform between the two Shaban crises. In fact, as the first section of this paper illustrated, Mobutu had responded to the earlier unrest with further purges of government officials and the army officer corps. Rather than reassessing its relationship with its intransigent ally, however, the Carter administration once more threw its weight behind Franco-Belgian security and economic revival plans to keep the Congolese president on his feet; facilitating both the airlift of the IAF and cajoling the donor community for a

⁵⁶⁰ Odom to Brzezinski and Aaron, State Department Paper: ‘Zaire: Options after Shaba II’, 25th May 1978; Subject File, Box 28, NSA, JCL

further extension of credit. This was, of course, one more matched by increasingly stringent calls for reform and even a direct demarche from President Carter to pressure his Congolese counterpart. Nevertheless, it is telling that these efforts to mend the ways of its erring ally always seemed to appear after his most immediate security concerns had been met.

All this reveals that traditional Cold War concerns remained the constant at the heart of American dealings with Congo from the outset of Carter's presidency and during both Shaba crises. Mobutu remained the only force trusted with upholding stability in Congo, albeit with a little help from his friends, and keeping communist subversion at bay. While this line may have been consistent, the administration's rhetorical approach to events in Shaba saw a startling about turn between 1977 and 1978. Despite its resistance to Mobutu's efforts to cast his troubles in terms of Soviet-Cuban meddling during the first crisis, by 1978 the White House took the lead in denouncing the apparent Cuban aggression in support of the second Katangan incursion. No doubt actual Soviet-Cuban activism in other areas of Africa, and the Horn in particular, contributed to this resurgent public posturing against the perceived gains of its superpower rival. This is peculiar nevertheless, as it not only risked escalating a local conflict into a further Cold War confrontation as analysts in 1977 had already stressed, but it also narrowed Washington's options in how to respond to the crisis. From Washington's vantage, if the darker forces of communist subversion were at work in Shaba, it would be that much more difficult to remain aloof from Congo's troubles or indeed bring pressure to bear on the Mobutu regime without risking a further defeat in the broader Cold War arena. This was no doubt not lost on Congo's recalcitrant leader and could not fail to have a detrimental impact on the American reformist drive in Congo, its relations with the wider region, as well as have broader implications for its relations with the Soviet Union in the broader Cold War. This forms the subject of the final section.

The Impact of Ambivalence: 'Incoherence and Decay'

As early as June 1978, the British Ambassador in Kinshasa, Alan Donald, had dismissed the Mobutu Plan as, 'little more than an inflated package of pious hopes.' At the same time, he warned that failing to curb Mobutu's domestic excesses was fraught with dangers for the Western position, as it would alienate 'some of our

more worthwhile African friends' and 'play into Soviet hands'.⁵⁶¹ Initially optimistic noises over Mobutu's reform program soon gave way to grunts of consternation from various corners of the administration.⁵⁶² Nevertheless, despite these warning signals, Washington did not respond with the threatened distancing from the Kinshasa regime. An initial reticence over further assistance to the IAF at the Paris and Brussels summits reflected renewed legislative constraints more than a shift in the executive's position, as Congress imposed a further FMS credit reduction from 10.5 to 8.5 million dollars. In fact, Mobutu no doubt noted with approval that continued financial commitments flowed from other American quarters and were matched by a softening in Washington's diplomatic associations.⁵⁶³ In May 1979, Brzezinski met with the reinstated Minister for Foreign Affairs, Nguza, and the following September Mobutu was finally awarded his long yearned for meeting with President Carter.⁵⁶⁴ This brief encounter was dominated by the issue of reform and did not compare to the fanfare Mobutu had enjoyed in Washington during the Nixon years, but it nevertheless proved a useful reassurance for the Congolese leader. Indeed, Ambassador Cutler noted that Mobutu's consternation over Washington's insistence on reform throughout 1978 was gradually replaced by a 'more relaxed and secure' mood over 'US intentions vis-à-vis Zaire' in 1979.⁵⁶⁵ As a result, even as the effort to reform Congo floundered, Carter softened its stance towards Kinshasa's intractable despot. This final section thus considers the impact of the Carter position for Congo itself, for American standing in the wider region and, ultimately, for its broader Cold War effort.

The most coherent case for the lack of progress in all facets of Congo's reform could be found in a CIA Intelligence Assessment completed in March 1979 under the title, 'Zaire: Incoherence and Decay in an Autocracy.' This report detailed how the Kinshasa regime had fallen far short of its pledges to reform its corrupt political

⁵⁶¹ Donald, Kinshasa to Owen, London, 'Last Chance for Mobutu', 9th June 1978; FCO, 99/162, Cuba/Zaire Shaba Relations, Kew

⁵⁶² Both from within its own ranks and from its Belgian allies- Gerald Funk (NSC) to Brzezinski reporting on meeting between Newsom and Cahen in Washington, North-South: Evening Report, 15th January 1979; NLC 10, CREST, JCL

⁵⁶³ This included some 36 million dollars a year in food, security and development assistance in 1979 and 1980, as well as an apparent 67 million dollars in subsidised rice sales between 1976 and early 1980. Vance to Carter, 27th February 1979; NLC2, CREST, JCL; Dusko Doder, 'Zaire Allegedly Diverted Food Aid from US Program', Washington Post 29th February 1980, A20

⁵⁶⁴ Memorandum of Conversation: 'Summary of Meeting between Dr. Brzezinski and Commissioner Nguza', 10th May 1979; Subject File, Box 33, NSA, JCL; Vance to Carter, 11th February 1979; NLC2, CREST, JCL

⁵⁶⁵ Cutler, Kinshasa to Secretary of State, 'Moose Meeting with Mobutu in Kisangani', 25th November 1978; NLC 16, CREST, JCL

practices and to rein in the scourge of its abusive security services. As such, the CIA reported,

‘Basically, “Mobutuism” is a classic example of political, social, and economic exploitation. The President’s authoritarian philosophy of *l’état c’est moi* has resulted in his ruling the country through a pervasive system of patronage, graft and corruption, and rewards and punishments.’

While he might pay lip service to reform and on occasion publically purged corrupt individuals, ultimately the chief obstacle in the eyes of the CIA in 1979 remained the president’s awareness, ‘that limiting the opportunities for corruption by relatives, cronies, and other influential military and civilian supporters, will lessen their loyalty to him.’⁵⁶⁶ Nor was any shift in its stance on the horizon. The role of government troops in the disappearance of UN trucks to be used for refugee relief in Shaba mentioned in the above 1979 report, the revelations of a Congressional investigation over some 1.3 million dollar proceeds of the American food for peace program being illegitimately paid to five close associates of Mobutu and the five million dollar deficit of American subsidised rice sales to counter chronic malnutrition in Congo in February 1980, alongside the World Bank crying foul at the government’s illegal misappropriation of some nine million dollars of GECAMINES receipts in March 1980, were all simply further examples of the inherent corruption of the Mobutuist state, always at the expense of ordinary Congolese.⁵⁶⁷

The long-promised overhaul of Congo’s military and security services looked just as bleak and Congressman Solarz commented in the summer of 1979, ‘Trying to reform the Zairian army is like trying to sell chastity belts to a whorehouse.’⁵⁶⁸ Inept at protecting the country’s territorial integrity and maintaining internal security, the CIA commented, ‘The Zairian Army (FAZ) is more a menace to the country’s civilian population than a threat to outside force.’ It went on to describe Mobutu’s apparently quite deliberate use of the entrenched ‘tribalism’ within the armed forces to ensure loyalty and prevent the emergence of a single alternative power block to his rule. The tension between General Babia, head of the FAZ, and officers from Mobutu’s home province of Equateur was only the most prominent example of this. No doubt maintaining a fractious security service that ultimately lived off local

⁵⁶⁶ CIA, Foreign Assessment Center, ‘Zaire: Incoherence and Decay in an Autocracy’, 9th March 1979; CREST, NARAI

⁵⁶⁷ Dusko Doder, ‘Zaire Allegedly Diverted Food Aid and US Program’ *Washington Post* 29th February 1980, A2; Funk to Brzezinski, North-South: Evening Reports, 31st March 1980; NLC 10, CREST, JCL

⁵⁶⁸ Keith Richburg, ‘Military Aid Reduction Seen as a Move to Divorce US from Zaire Regime’, *Washington Post*, 14th August 1979, A14

populations continued to be the surest way of subjugating distant provinces to Kinshasa's rule, as the report concluded. So effective was Mobutu's stick-and-carrot rule still in 1979 that, while noting the dilapidated state of all facets of Congolese society and the evermore-tenuous grip of Mobutu's regime, the report conceded that Congo's president had successfully prevented any alternative leadership from forming out of the widespread apathy to his rule.⁵⁶⁹ As a result, not only was the attempted rejuvenation of Congo's corrupt government stillborn but the prospects for a workable political transition towards a more moderate and inclusive government were also dismal.

The biggest loser in this failed reform was, of course, the population at large in Congo whose lot continued to fester. As such, the above quoted CIA report noted the rampant inflation caused by fuel and food shortages, the corresponding hunger, malnutrition and disease (exacerbated by drought in Bas-Zaïre in 1979) alongside the harassments of the security services that continued to haunt the downtrodden citizens of America's long term ally. Indicative of the underdevelopment of the whole, Kivu was cited as the hardest hit regional example and the CIA analysis summarised the situation as follows,

'Several of the Zaïre's regions are so physically and psychologically separated from Kinshasa that they are part of the country in name only. Deteriorating roads, shortages of fuel, and limited contacts with the capital contribute to the general isolation and social malaise. Kivu has been particularly hard hit. Roads between eastern and western Kivu have been impassable for years. In addition, all available food is flown to the capital from Kivu and other outlying regions. Instead of looking to Kinshasa and the central government for relief, the capital is regarded as an exploiter, and inhabitants of Kivu and other rural areas see Kinshasa as largely responsible for their problems. The US consul in Kivu reports that in some rural areas the money economy has completely disappeared and the population has reverted to a pre-colonial lifestyle.'⁵⁷⁰

The devastating effect of the continued propping up of the corrupt Kinshasa regime on Congolese society at large was thus abundantly clear. Perhaps more relevant from Washington's vantage, however, was the impact these policies had on the standing of the United States throughout the region.

⁵⁶⁹ CIA, Foreign Assessment Center, 'Zaïre: Incoherence and Decay in an Autocracy', 9th March 1979; CREST, NARAII

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid. All parts of the country were effected by this neglect of the most basic human rights, of course, and an Amnesty International report in May 1980 publicized the abuses around Kinshasa prisons and detention centres ranging torture, rape, murder and starvation; FCO 106/194- Human Rights in Zaïre

Secretary of State Kissinger had already set the agenda for a reinvigorated engagement of the more divisive southern African issues at the end of his term in the hope of reviving the tarnished American image and warding off further Soviet-Cuban gains on the continent. Alongside his overt emphasis on human rights, Carter followed suit continuing diplomatic initiatives to facilitate a transition to majority rule in Zimbabwe and pushing for a South African withdrawal from Namibia. While quite prepared to follow the British lead in the negotiations that ensued, this was a clear effort to be identified with the progressive forces of history in Africa by championing a peaceful transition to independence. Its alliance with the reactionary former colonial masters and a corrupt and oppressive regime in Congo, however, stood in stark contrast to these efforts. American planes once more bringing Belgian and French troops to Congo in May 1978 no doubt was a difficult image for a continent in which the struggle for independence from the yolk of colonial mastery and white minority rule remained far from complete. Indeed, in this broader African context the American Congo policies appeared all the more questionable.

By the end of the 1970s Mobutu lacked any credibility as a serious force in the African international arena. A unilaterally launched mediation effort on the on going Zimbabwean negotiations left his contemporaries at the OAU cold. Even the British, while sceptically appreciative, saw this for what it was; an empty public relations gesture for Washington and London's benefit.⁵⁷¹ Vis-à-vis the West, he did receive some mileage out of his willingness to reach rapprochement with Angola and his acceptance, however fruitless, of Nigerian negotiation efforts over Shaba as this appeared to cast him in a more moderate conciliatory light. Just as during earlier crises, Mobutu was quite willing to make grand diplomatic gestures, at little actual cost to his personal position, to avoid addressing the more substantive domestic issues. Unfortunately, the reports of the Paris and Brussels summits suggest that his Western benefactors were all too eager to take this as *prima facie* evidence of his willingness to cooperate justifying continued assistance. Indeed, it was the Western response to the aftermath of the second Shaba crisis that caused the most consternation throughout African political circles. Alongside the Franco-Belgian military operations, the fact that Western powers were again meeting in Paris and Brussels to determine Congo's security and financial arrangements was particularly irksome as it once more bypassed and emasculated regional organisations and mediation efforts.

⁵⁷¹ Donald, Kinshasa to FCO, London, 'Intervention by President Mobutu with leaders of Front Line States', 5th June 1979; FCO 36/2534- Zaire's Involvement in the Rhodesian Problem, Kew

It is hard to gauge the reactions around Africa accurately but an exchange of letters between President Carter and the heads of state of two relatively friendly African governments, Nigerian Lt. General Olusegun Obasanjo and Tanzanian Julius Nyerere, in the summer of 1978 reveals the extent of the outrage felt. Obasanjo criticised not only the failure to negotiate with local forces and the corresponding casualties in the immediate Shaba context, but also the Paris talks and resultant IAF security solution as further foreign intrusions that prevented an African resolution to a local conflict as he wrote, ‘...Western powers rushed to intervene militarily and to underscore Africa’s helplessness, in a situation that called for utmost caution and restraint.’⁵⁷² Himself the successor of a military coup, Obasanjo showed restraint in criticising the internal dynamics of the Mobutist state and was careful to condemn all foreign meddling in Africa equally. Nyerere, by contrast, was more tolerant of Cuban involvement in Angola and Ethiopia as a necessary counterbalance to South African and Somali aggression respectively. Despite the warming of mutual relations with the United States signified by Nyerere’s state visit in August 1977, following the Western reaction to Shaba II the Tanzanian President could contain himself no longer. His public demarche to both Western diplomats and journalists on June 8th over the Paris meetings preceded two letters to President Carter that month.

The exchange that followed between the two heads of state reveals Carter’s fundamental failure to appreciate these sensitivities over continued Western interference in Africa. Carter thus framed his response to Nyerere in terms of the immediate humanitarian crisis (ignoring Obasanjo’s charge over the Western failure to seek negotiations) and continued with the tired but all too familiar argument that the incumbent regime in Congo had to be protected to avoid the chaos that would otherwise ensue. Bearing in mind that this reasoning had now been employed for nigh on thirteen years, Carter’s repost was not entirely convincing when he wrote,

‘Whatever one may think about some of the practices and policies of the Zaire government, it is impossible to imagine any benefit that might follow to Zaire or to Africa from a repetition of the internal chaos that plagued Zaire during the mid and late 1960s and brought such suffering and deprivation to the population.’⁵⁷³

⁵⁷² Telegram from Warren Christopher to American Embassy Lagos, Nigeria, ‘Obasanjo Letter to President Carter’ (dated 1st June, delivered 12th June by Nigerian embassy), 13th June 1978; NLC 16, CREST, JCL

⁵⁷³ Letter from Carter to Nyerere, 10th June 1978; NLC 16, CREST, JCL

That Nyerere was unimpressed by this, and Carter's continued professions of Congo's reform program, is evidenced by his second letter critiquing the American role in propping up the Mobutu regime in considerable detail. Indeed, Brzezinski passed a copy of this letter, complete with annotations by the American President, to Vance on the 22nd June and both its content and Carter's commentary make for fascinating reading.

"These "rescue operations" are by their nature the privilege and prerogative of the rich and powerful in relation to the weak,' Nyerere began. As it was Western support that enabled the continuing abuses of the Mobutu regime, he continued,

'I hold no brief for the Shaban rebels; indeed I have some suspicion about their purposes. But I am very aware of Africa's need for change in Zaire so that it can become a decent place for its people to live in and less of a worry for its neighbours. I do not see how this is going to happen until political changes have been forced upon the country by the peoples themselves. But the day that kind of thing is going to become possible is further postponed when the present structure is maintained by bloody intervention which not only upholds the Mobutu regime but also gives note that the regime will continue to be defended by Europe. Under those circumstances there is no pressure upon President Mobutu to seek a political settlement with his opponents.'

This passage was underlined, presumably by Carter, with the comment, 'strange logic.' Unfortunately, events in Congo would prove this strange logic to be devastatingly accurate as has been seen.

Nyerere went on to criticise the Western dominance over Congo and its economic grip on the continent as a whole. Carter's somewhat weak annotation retorted that the attacks were out of Angola and Zambia, not Congo itself, and that the West didn't have forty to fifty thousand troops in Africa. That this failed to appreciate African concerns over neo-colonial meddling was clear as Nyerere continued,

'I am therefore very worried when I see ex-colonial powers extending their control over African governments, as is the case of Zaire where they are deliberately propping up an unstable government which is indebted to them because it is the most pliable government they are likely to get into that country. This is of us much concern to me as similar action by the USSR would be... You say to me, "the activities of the Soviet Union and Cuba, while they may sometimes coincide with the legitimate aspirations of Africans, are directed primarily towards enhancement of their own special interests." I do not

disagree at all; you are right. But can you disagree when I say, “the activities of the West European countries and the USA, while they may sometimes coincide with the legitimate aspirations of Africans, are directed primarily towards enhancement of their own special interests.’

The Tanzanian leader flatly rejected his American counterparts report that the United States, at least, was not pursuing its aims through by pointing to the CIA’s support of the FNLA during the Angolan civil war in response to Havana’s alleged support of the Katangans. A strange case of denial prompted Carter to highlight this passage with the expletive acronym ‘B.S.’. Finally, in lamenting the failure of the Western deliberations over Congo to make use of available African diplomatic channels, and the OAU in particular, for the resolution of a regional crisis, Nyerere once more illustrated his dismay over perceived Western arrogance and continued neo-colonial subjugation of parts of the continent.⁵⁷⁴

Ultimately, all this demonstrates that the U.S. collaboration with Mobutu and his European allies, while steeped in the language of reform, was fraught with problems for the American standing in the wider region. That Mobutu’s days were numbered without further Western assistance seemed clear to outside observers in Washington, Europe and Africa alike; making Nyerere’s call to allow the ailing regime to fall of its own weight all the more poignant as it suggested a degree of culpability for those governments that continued their blinkered support. The letters of the Nigerian and Tanzanian Presidents in response to the Second Shaba crisis illustrate that the view from at least two prominent African leaders once more placed the United States in the camp of a corrupt regime seen as the proxy of the old colonial order. That this was in no small part due to Washington’s failure to transcend the Cold War paradigm it had sought to eclipse was amply illustrated by Carter’s own commentary of Nyerere’s in depth analysis and the continued emphasis on security entailed therein. Thus, by its own choosing, the United States had once more actively brought the Cold War to the turmoil in Congo with disastrous consequences for the population of the latter and unpleasant side effects for its own status in the region.

Beyond these local and regional implications, the broader consequences of Carter’s Congo policies appear to have had a profound, if not immediately obvious, effect on American geo-strategic relations with the Soviet Union. That Washington was prepared to risk its recent softening of relations with Cuba and even cynically misuse the newly established USINT office in Havana has been discussed earlier.

⁵⁷⁴ Brzezinski to Vance, ‘President’s Reaction to Nyerere’s Letter’, 22nd June 1978; NLC 2, CREST, JCL

Indeed, Lyle Lane summarised Castro's own exasperation in a meeting with Congressmen Beilenson and Solarz on the in the wake of the second Shaba crisis with the following report, 'On the Shaba incident, Castro expressed rage (in front of journalists) and a sense of personal hurt that his efforts to remain uninvolved and even head off the attack had been received so poorly in the US.'⁵⁷⁵ Nor could the Soviet Union's very public blasting of American 'neo-colonialism' in its own press have come as a huge surprise.⁵⁷⁶ More significant, however, is the impact this appears to have had on direct American-Soviet relations. In his analysis of events in the Horn, Westad makes the point that Moscow was 'unaware of the profound effects their Third World policies were having on American perceptions of the future détente process.'⁵⁷⁷ Perhaps at least part of the answer lies in the disparity between Carter's denunciations of the Soviet Union in this sphere and his own policies in support of the Mobutu regime. With an eye to what it perceived as a long-term aggressive American strategy in Congo, the Soviet Union possibly could not imagine that American outrage over its involvement in the Horn was genuine. When Carter raised the subject of Africa in a meeting with Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, to discuss strategic arms limitation and comprehensive test ban treaty in Washington during the closing stages of the second Shaba intervention, he was met with disgruntled exacerbation as Gromyko flatly denied any Soviet involvement and simply hinted at American past transgressions. In a veiled reference to American meddling in Congo during the early 1960s Gromyko commented, 'The Soviet Union knew absolutely nothing about the recent actions of the so-called gendarmes of Katanga. The word brought back memories of the period when Tshombe was in charge.'⁵⁷⁸

Even more telling, however, is an exchange between Secretary Vance and the Soviet Foreign Minister two days later. In his concluding remarks, Vance once more broached the impact of antagonistic African policies on détente more broadly. Gromyko's irritated response again focused on Congo as he fired back,

⁵⁷⁵ Lane, USINT Havana to Secretary of State, 'Solarz Meets with Fidel Castro', 13th June 1978; Press Powell, Box 55, Staff Offices, JCL

⁵⁷⁶ Aaron to Carter, Information Items: 'Soviet Press Blasts US Africa Policy', 24th May 1978; Daily Report File, Box 5, NSA, JCL

⁵⁷⁷ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* p. 283

⁵⁷⁸ Cabinet Room, The White House, Subjects: SALT, CTB, Africa, Human Rights, (US participants- President Carter, Secretary Vance, Secretary Brown, Dr. Brzezinski, Ambassador Paul C. Wanke, Ambassador Malcolm Toon, David Aaron, Reginald Bartholomew, Hamilton Jordan, Jody Powell; USSR Participants- Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Gromyko, Ambassador Dobrynin, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Korniyenko, Ambassador Makarov, Minister Counselor Bessmertnykh, V.G. Komplektov, V. N. Detinov), 27th May 1978 8am-12:20pm; Vertical Files Box 115, JCL

'I must say that in this case a total and crude distortion of the real situation is taking place.... Why is this done? Being realists, we started to look for reasons for such absurd assertions. We came to the conclusion that it is necessary to search for those reasons in the attempts of some definite forces, particularly in the United States, to create a screen through which it would be more difficult for people to understand the true situation, in order to justify its own actions in Africa, which appear as interference in the domestic affairs of the countries in the continent... An illustration of this statement is the slaughter that took place in Zaire not long ago. In fact, neither the USSR nor Cuba had anything to do with it. Pass my words on to the President. Tell him that the assertions, which we confront in connection with events in Africa, in particular Zaire, we can treat only as pure and deliberate fiction. As it happened, some individuals and governments themselves threw an explosive ball of lightning into the arena and are now saying: look, how terrible that looks. We are not responsible for someone else's sins. Those who sin are responsible.'⁵⁷⁹

In other words, the Soviet reaction to American criticism of its Africa policies was one of outrage over its apparent misrepresentation in the Shaba affair and a degree of cynicism of what it perceived as Washington's hypocrisy in Congo.

To be sure, it would be an overstatement to argue that American actions during the two Shaba crises directly encouraged the Soviet-Cuban intervention on the Horn. If nothing else, the conventional war between Ethiopia and Somalia was already coming to a close by the time of the second US-Franco-Belgian intervention in Shaba in May 1978.⁵⁸⁰ The Soviet motivations here fall beyond the scope of this study but it seems reasonably clear that America's rival was very much pursuing its own agenda following the successes of Angola. Nevertheless, the above exchanges do suggest that Moscow's failure to appreciate quite how seriously its actions would be viewed in Washington can be attributed to a certain degree to its very different interpretation of American meddling in Congo. After all, from this perspective, could Soviet support of the Mengistu regime be seen as so very different to the on going American role in propping up Mobutu since the very beginning of his rule? As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, Brzezinski's own memoirs reflected that, 'détente lies buried in the sands of the Ogaden.'⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁹ Record of the Main Content of the Conversation between Minister Andrei Gromyko and Secretary Vance, 31st May 1978, New York; Vertical Files, Box 115, JCL

⁵⁸⁰ Westad dates the end of conventional war between these two powers with the recapture of Jijiga on 5th March 1978 by Cuban and Ethiopian soldiers led by Soviet and Cuban officers. Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* p. 278

⁵⁸¹ Brzezinski, *The Power and the Principle* p.189

When this statement is considered, the failure of the Carter administration to reformulate the American approach to Congo, and all that this entailed in how the two superpowers viewed their respective forays in Africa, takes on an even weightier significance. Ultimately then, the Carter administration had professed the reform of its long-term ally in Kinshasa, had sought to play a more positive role to boost American standing in the region and was pursuing a softening of relations with the Soviet Union in the fields of strategic arms limitations. On all three counts it fell short and it was the conservatism of Carter's Congo strategy that had proved a considerable obstacle to these aims.

Conclusion

Jimmy Carter's declared intent was to reject the blinkered Cold War paradigm that simply embraced any dictator that flaunted an anti-communist line and to hold firm in the reform of America's less palatable allies. It would be difficult to imagine a more suited project for this revision of American foreign policy than Washington's alliance with Mobutu. From the very outset, however, as soon as the Congolese despot was threatened by the Katangan uprising in the first months of Carter's presidency, Washington sprang to the rescue of its ally of old in familiar fashion. While the deliberations of the various corners of the administration in Washington betrayed considerable angst over its support of the Kinshasa regime and a keen desire to play a secondary role behind its European allies in any overt identification with his survival in the name of stability and American credibility. By the time of the second Shaba crisis, the rhetoric of the administration had caught up with its policies and was now publically berating the perceived Cold War dimension to Mobutu's troubles, even in the absence of concrete evidence in support of such claims. The professed reform of Congo's parasitic elite, however, remained a much vaunted but secondary concern to Washington throughout this period.

Perhaps the trickiest piece of the Carter puzzle, then, is the question over the sincerity of his human rights and reform agenda. Did the public pressure on Mobutu constitute a genuine effort to reform his corrupt regime, or was this simply lip service to mollify an increasingly critical Congress and a disenchanted domestic audience? To be sure, in contrast to its predecessors and the lackadaisical attitude of Kissinger in particular, there was a more constant high-level commitment to goading the Kinshasa regime towards reform than had previously been seen in the past twelve years of the Washington-Kinshasa relationship. As a result, to dismiss

this as mere rhetorical politicking is perhaps too harsher criticism. Why, however, did security concerns consistently trump this reformist drive in defining the Carter approach to Congo?

Part of the answer no doubt lies in the broader motivations behind the Congo policies that emerged from the Carter administration. As has been noted in previous chapters, much has been made of the American economic stakes in the resource-rich Congo defining its policies towards its African ally. This chapter has shown, however, that the prevalent view in Washington considered that these interests could be preserved regardless of the nature of the regime or, indeed, who headed the Kinshasa government. While some advisors did stress American economic stakes, at no point in the record over policy deliberations did this lead to a softening of the stance on Mobutu and there was certainly no underhand pull of the government placating private businesses. Nor was the issue of race as prevalent or apparent in the documentary record of the Carter years as in previous chapters. Perhaps this reflects a growing awareness over such cultural prejudices with the changing times or perhaps it is simply owed to the fact that the entire record has not as yet been declassified. Nevertheless, while a continuing willingness to dismiss complex local issues blandly as 'tribal' prevailed in certain reports and Carter's own reflection in his letter to Mobutu that he did not wish to transpose 'American norms' on Congo perhaps betrayed a certain cultural bias, the issue of race does not appear to have significantly impacted America's Congo agenda at this time, at least overtly in the record available. Ultimately, as the analysis of the two Shaban crises has shown, from its very outset the Carter administration was unable to transcend the Cold War fears and constraints that had plagued the United States' approach to Congo since the 1960s. This lay at the heart of Washington's failure to exert more consistent pressure on the intractable Mobutu or align its European allies into a more concerted front for the reform of Congo.

Indeed, a review of the Carter years betrays a remarkable continuity with his predecessors in a long established line of reasoning that in Congo the alternative to Mobutu was a descent once more into chaos opening the door to further communist subversion in the region. This central tenet of the Carter approach to Congo resulted in a policy that not only saw the United States play an instrumental role in the on-going financial bailout of Congo but also offer important logistical assistance to two European-organised African 'peace-keeping' forces and a direct Franco-Belgian military intervention in response to the Katangan incursions into Shaba province in 1977 and 1978. While its initial assessment of the Katangan movement

suggested a relatively accurate reading in Washington of the local discontent behind the uprising and a rejection of Mobutu's own efforts to portray his more parochial troubles in terms of a broader Cold War struggle, by the time of the second crisis Carter himself was once more leading a public attack against alleged Cuban involvement based on scanty evidence that again cast Congo's troubles in terms of the superpower rivalry in Africa. Combined with Washington's willingness to follow a European lead in the safeguarding of Congo's perceived security needs, as well as Mobutu's own intransigence, this ensured that Congo's reform agenda would ultimately come to nothing. Furthermore, despite the proclaimed conditionality of American aid, Washington never followed these threats through to their logical conclusion to withdraw its backing of the Mobutu regime. The outcome was a strangely ambivalent policy that at once sought to distance America from its Congolese ally, and especially the by now controversial figure of Mobutu himself, while continuing to play a key role in Mobutu's survival. As Nyerere pointed out, this strengthened Congo's corrupt despot in his resistance to reform and accommodation with the country's dissident voices.

The devastating consequences for ordinary Congolese sinking deeper into poverty under the combination of the country's economic stagnation, the exploitation of a corrupt system of governance and the abuses of the ill-disciplined security services were tragically familiar by now. At the same time, Washington's cooperation with France and Belgium in Congo once more placed it in the camp of the former colonial powers further tarnishing the American image in the region, as the Nigerian and Tanzanian reactions clearly indicated. From their perspective, despite some positive moves with regards to Zimbabwe and Rhodesia, America thus remained aligned with those powers looking to extend their exploitative privileges from the colonial days and with an oppressive minority government initially imposed from outside in Congo in the minds of Africa's political leaders. Beyond this immediate regional impact and perhaps a little more speculatively, these policies appeared to also have a profound effect on Soviet-US relations. Washington's outrage over what it saw as violations of détente in Africa was not fully appreciated in Moscow, not least due to the perceived hypocrisy over the American stance and its continuing forays in Congo. In other words, Washington's own ambivalence over Congo contributed at least in part to a fundamental and mutual misreading of the two rivals' respective Africa policies, which in turn led to a marked souring of relations and ultimately played a role in the breakdown of détente.

More generally, the above analysis reveals a startling similarity between the American approach to Congo during the Johnson and Carter years. Neither administration was able to transcend its immediate Cold War concerns despite accurate intelligence over the very limited nature of any actual communist role in Congo during these respective periods. Both failed to appreciate on-going African diplomatic efforts to resolve local conflicts and ended up actively involved in direct European military interventions in support of Mobutu, in Kisangani (formerly Stanleyville) and Shaba respectively, with all that this entailed for the American image on the continent. Following the formula that turmoil in Congo might lead to communist gains in the future and thus required preventive American action was as accepted under Carter as it was over a decade earlier by the Johnson administration. Of course, Carter was contending with a much more active Soviet-Cuban presence throughout Africa, in the wake of Angola and the conflict on the Horn, making its trepidation over further communist gains a little more understandable. On the other hand, the impotence of the American reliance on Mobutu and the failure of Congo to play any useful role in staving off communist gains in the region had been clearly demonstrated by the failure of its joint Angola venture.

Following the resounding defeat in Angola, American foreign policy makers had understood that it was in their interest to redress Washington's stance towards Africa and proactively engage the continent's more contentious problems, and the issues of white minority rule in Zimbabwe and South Africa in particular. This about turn was amply illustrated by Kissinger's whirlwind tour of Africa in his final year in office. Carter looked to go even further, not only supporting the British diplomatic initiatives over Zimbabwe but also boldly proclaiming an idealistic foreign policy to reinvigorate the American image around the globe. When it came to Congo, however, the Carter administration revealed a deep-seated Cold War conservatism from the outset and an inability to fulfil its avowed intention to transcend '... that inordinate fear of communism which once led us to embrace any dictator who joined us in that fear.'⁵⁸² The result was the continued support of the corrupt Mobutu regime and an alignment with the old European order; with all that this entailed for Congo, America's regional standing and the Cold War more broadly. In other words, despite the bitter experience of a costly and impotent fifteen-year alliance with the Mobutu regime, Congo continued to define the American approach

⁵⁸² Quote from a key foreign policy address given by President Carter at the University of Notre Dame, 22nd May 1977; cited in William Stueck, *Placing Jimmy Carter's Foreign Policy* in Gary M. Fink & Hugh Davis Graham, *The Carter Presidency* p.247

towards Africa and remained an obstacle to the United States playing a more constructive role on the continent.

Conclusion

If today's Congo remains Africa's 'heart of darkness', it is largely due to the legacy of the Mobutu regime, a regime that was fostered and sustained by the United States. To be sure, the historical and geographical burdens of arbitrary borders, backward administrative capabilities and violent extractive policies bequeathed by the Belgian colonial legacy, combined with the mixed blessings of Congo's vast natural resources in a largely landlocked country, predated the Mobutu era.⁵⁸³ Added to this mix in today's crisis are Congo's African neighbours casting eager glances towards the country's riches, the cross-border ethnic tensions that continue in its more disparate regions (and the Kivus in particular) and the more modern phenomena of 'War Lordism' that plagues Africa's failed states.⁵⁸⁴ There is nothing teleological, however, in pointing to the total decay within Congo's borders, vividly embodied by the final retreat of Mobutu's cancer ridden self in 1997, that permitted these forces to descend on Congo and turn it into the battle ground of Africa's world war.⁵⁸⁵

It is no coincidence that even today the regions that remain plagued by intractable violence are the provinces that suffered from the most neglect in Mobutu's Congo. The CIA assessments of the Kivus throughout the 1970s read much like contemporary Human Rights Watch reports; each detailing the on-going abuses suffered by civilians caught between government forces and local militia factions, the dilapidated infrastructure and the impossible depredation of much of the population living outside the moneyed economy.⁵⁸⁶ Similarly, alongside its repressive capabilities, the systemic and pervasive corruption that continues to haunt today's Congo was the central hallmark of the Mobutu regime.⁵⁸⁷ As such, the continued suffering of millions of ordinary Congolese even today adds pertinence to the conclusions drawn from this study of the American role in the establishment and sustenance of the Mobutist state.

During the Johnson years, with its support of the 1965 coup, Washington was drawn into a peculiar form of state building in Congo. Rather than engaging the very

⁵⁸³ Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (Yale University Press, 1994)

⁵⁸⁴ For a survey of these complex forces see the collection of essays in John F. Clark, *The African Stakes of the Congo War* (Palgrave Macmillan; New York, 2004) and a volume titled 'State Failure in the Congo' in *Review of African Political Economy* Vol. 29 No. 93/94, (September 2002)

⁵⁸⁵ Thomas E. Turner, *The Congo Wars; Conflict, Myth and Reality* (Zed Books, London & New York, 2007)

⁵⁸⁶ Compare, for example, the CIA's report 'Zaire: Incoherence and Decay in an Autocracy' 9th March 1979; CREST, NARAI; to Human Rights Watch, *You Will Be Punished* (December 2009) and Human Rights Watch, *Soldiers Who Rape, Commanders Who Condone; Sexual Violence and the Democratic Republic of Congo* (July 2009)

⁵⁸⁷ Mark John and Thomas Hubert, 'Minerals, Graft and Miles of Red Tape' *New York Times*, 20-21st February 2010, p.9

real and accurately reported problems facing the fledgling nation, a series of crass manipulations saw the United States emerge as Mobutu's main benefactor and ally. Upheld as a success by the intelligence community as continued American support and a fortuitous rise in the world copper price saw a semblance of stability return to Congo, it was under the Nixon-Kissinger White House that the opportunistic meddling of the mid-1960s was formalised as a strategy. Mobutu perfectly and willingly fitted the 'Nixon Doctrine' and appeared to offer a workable low-cost, if superficial, *modus operandi* for dealing with the region. Nixon's very public endorsement of Mobutu and open encouragement of private businesses to invest in Congo, just as the profligate dictator increasingly asserted his own agenda, played an integral part in the country's descent towards 'kleptocracy'. Kissinger's hapless Angola adventure soon exposed the short sighted and shallow nature of America's Mobutu partnership, however. Congo was neither the regional force the United States had hoped for nor was the Kinshasa regime's agenda anything more than superficially aligned with Washington's Cold War aims. Even in the wake of this ignoble defeat, however, a decade of support was not easily abandoned despite the arrival of Jimmy Carter and his avowedly moral revision of American foreign policy. In the eyes of Washington, Mobutu remained the key to stability in a troubled country and his survival intimately tied to American credibility. When his regime seemed threatened, from the outset the Carter administration sprang to his rescue much like his predecessors and the reform of the recalcitrant despot remained a secondary and unfulfilled vision.

The longevity of the American support for Mobutu, with few tangible gains for the United States, is extremely difficult to understand. It no doubt lends credence to commentators placing economic considerations at the heart of America's Congo policies. A central finding of the research conducted here, however, is that at no point does the documentary record support the claims of David Gibbs' 'Business Conflict Model' that sees private businesses directing government policies. In fact, even by the end of the 1970s the White House was all too aware that US private foreign investments into sub-Saharan Africa over the entire period under consideration never grew beyond the meagre three per cent of the global total from the mid-1960s (with an estimated two hundred million dollars of direct investment in Congo making up the smallest fraction of this).⁵⁸⁸ The broader assertion that the United States was simply looking to secure strategically vital raw materials also

⁵⁸⁸ Memorandum for Brzezinski, 'US Economic Interests in Sub-Saharan Africa', 29th March 1977; Geographic File, Box 14, NSA, JCL

needs questioning. In line with Forbes Pachter's thesis, even the contemporary intelligence record reasoned that any regime in Kinshasa would be so dependent on foreign earnings that continued access to its minerals was assured.⁵⁸⁹ That Congo's geographic vastness, its centrality in Africa and its rich mineral endowment made it a prized 'domino' in Africa is clear. It was the fear of the Soviets gaining a strategic foothold (and the concomitant blow to American credibility), rather than the loss of access to resources, that consistently haunted Washington's Congo deliberations, however.

As a result, a more subtle reading of the economic factors entailed in American government policy towards Congo emerges. Benoit Verhaegan offers a detailed analysis of the devastating impact of foreign private business ventures, and Western government financing for Mobutu's penchant for military hardware and industrial prestige projects, on Congo's underdevelopment in the 1970s. Combining Verhaegan's thesis with the findings of the third chapter detailing the Nixon administration's active encouragement of private businesses to deal directly with the Kinshasa regime and invest in Congo has a number of profound implications. First of all, and contrary to Gibbs, it was actually the American government that sought to harness the corporate world in pursuit of its own more narrow geo-strategic aims rather than the other way round. Secondly and a little more speculatively, the American seal of approval entailed in Nixon's emphatic embrace of his Congolese counterpart in the name of the Cold War seemed to lend an air of legitimacy to the forces that looked to continue the exploitation of Congo's resources. Any thought for the plight of ordinary Congolese, even in the limited form of the humanitarian pretensions of the former colonisers, was notably absent from American strategic considerations. Simply relying on the dealings of private companies with a corrupt Congolese elite was a far cry from a sustainable vision for the country's development, however, and Nixon's flawed policies directly contributed to Congo's financial collapse and the further impoverishment of its citizens. Indeed, even in the wake of its fiscal ruin, successive Washington administrations continued to successfully cajole the IMF and international donor community to bail out the intractable dictator.

Throughout, geostrategic considerations and a deep-seated containment impulse remained the central tenet of the American approach to Congo from Johnson to Carter. More hardened Cold War warriors thus offset the plight of

⁵⁸⁹ DCI Turner, 'Implications of the Collapse of the Government of Zaire', 17th March 1977; NLC 2, CREST, JCL

ordinary Congolese during the Mobutu era against an apparent Cold War victory. Lawrence Devlin's self-congratulatory memoirs, for example, willingly cite his efforts as the CIA's Station Chief in Kinshasa as instrumental in keeping the Soviets out of central Africa and by extension contributing to the eventual defeat of the superpower rival. This research has shown, however, that for most of the period under review Washington's close associations with Mobutu were detrimental even to immediate American aims.

First of all, its identification with the Kinshasa despot had profound consequences for the American relationship with the wider region. On the one hand, throughout the period under review Washington entirely failed to engage regional actors and organisations in resolving the pressing issues facing Congo, much to the consternation of Africa's nascent leadership. The failure to take seriously the OAU's efforts during the Kisangani crisis in 1964 were bemoaned by Nkrumah just as Nyerere decried Carter's willingness to circumvent African mediation efforts during the Shaba crisis more than a decade later. Both publicly denounced America's continued propping up of the Mobutu regime and unwillingness to trust in African regional forums. More important still, however, was the deeply negative impact on the American image throughout the region of its close ties with a leader who was not only linked with the murder of Patrice Lumumba but whose continued associations with both apartheid South Africa and the former colonial powers of France and Belgium ensured that he never quite ventured out of the neo-colonial camp in the public arena. Time and again, from the Kisangani airlift in 1964, the Angolan civil war, and again during the two Shaba interventions by the end of the 1970s, the United States remained tied to the reactionary forces of white minority rule and former colonial masters in its continued meddling in Congo and support of Mobutu's regime.

Even in terms of Washington's more immediate Cold War strategies, however, its Mobutu partnership was deeply flawed. The 1965 coup was deemed a successful restoration of a semblance of stability to turbulent Congo and a self-satisfied gloating permeated the later analyses of the Johnson administration. Beyond these initially optimistic resonances, Mobutu actually had little of value to offer to the American designs for fostering a Kinshasa regime that could preserve regional stability, counteract communist advances and provide a loyal voice in African and Third World forums. True, Mobutu relatively consistently touted the American line both at the United Nations, the OAU and the various Non-Aligned conferences, much to the satisfaction of his Washington benefactors. The mercenary nature of this

bought voice was all too transparent and Mobutu never managed to actually fill the shoes of the grand African statesman he sought to be. The rejection of his mediation efforts during the Zimbabwean negotiations demonstrated Congo's president's lack of credibility all too clearly once more by the end of the 1970s. That the paper tiger Congolese army, despite continuous funding and training efforts from the United States and Europe, could offer little resistance even to the most ramshackle forces was amply demonstrated by both the Angolan civil war and the two Shaba crises.

Beyond these diplomatic and military shortcomings, however, American Congo policies seemed to have an altogether more profound impact upon the broader Cold War. First of all, the fourth chapter demonstrated that Mobutu's manoeuvring and Kissinger's reliance on his Kinshasa ally contributed to a large extent to the formulation of a faulty Angola strategy. This defeat not only tarnished American prestige and credibility but also contributed to a growing Eastern Bloc self-confidence and further Soviet-Cuban interventions in Africa. Secondly and a little more speculatively, the implications of the final chapter suggest that Moscow's interpretation of America's continued involvement in Congo contributed to a fundamental mutual misreading of its rival's position in Africa by each of the superpowers. Brzezinski himself attributed the breakdown of détente to the perceived rise of Soviet bellicosity on the Horn. As the exchange between Vance and Gromyko cited in the final chapter illustrates, however, from the Soviet vantage their actions were no more intrusive than the American role in Congo of the past two decades. How far this diplomatic breakdown in communication contributed to unnecessarily prolonging the Cold War goes beyond the scope of this study, but it seems clear that this was not in the line with American diplomatic aims pursued at the time. As such, whether viewed from a narrow Congolese perspective, from the vantage of the American standing in Africa more broadly or even from the United States' immediate Cold War aims, Washington's Mobutu relationship was an imperfect marriage with few benefits for anyone beyond the ambrosial Congolese tyrant and his immediate circle.

In its considerations of American foreign policy and the broader Cold War, recent scholarship has taken a step forward in its focus on the Third World or, as Westad puts it, 'shifted south'.⁵⁹⁰ As such, the literature detailing how the superpower interventions of the Cold War era shaped the issues that continue to haunt today's Third World is growing. This framework certainly holds true for Congo. Refining this interpretation further is the revelation that forces from within

⁵⁹⁰ Westad, *Global Cold War* p. 1

the Third World at times proved instrumental in shaping the superpower agenda or, as McCormick notes, 'the tail wagging the dog.'⁵⁹¹ Gleijeses's 'Conflicting Missions' is a vivid example of the impact of a relatively minor power on the global arena. This study of American-Congolese relations, however, offers a peculiar version of this phenomenon from an American perspective. Here a seemingly weak and dependent ally (rather than an ominous nationalist movement), to a large extent called into being by the United States, managed to secure continued American support over decades while utterly derailing American interests. In Angola, Kissinger sought to control events on the ground through a covert operation and the use of a proxy ally. Mobutu, on the other hand, looked to draw renewed support from his inattentive superpower benefactor and bolster his own narrow regime at home. Despite the defeat of his FAZ in an unpopular war, it is clear which of the strategists was more successful in asserting his interests.

The above interpretations also have important ramifications for the Africanist perspective on Congo. The American intervention was not simply a one-sided story of economic and political exploitation. As such, this study is a step towards bettering our understanding of how the Mobutu relationship in turn shaped American policy and the broader Cold War, lending further weight to the scholarship on the internal machinations of the Mobutist state. Indeed, the research conducted here is perhaps open to the charge of being too Mobutu-centric. The peculiar path taken by his regime was not imposed from outside and throughout his rule he was always able to find willing collaborators from within Congo. That said, it was his foreign benefactors, and the United States in particular, that permitted a narrow Congolese elite to function and realise its own exploitation of Congo. If anything, this calls for the need for further study in linking the internal events in Congo in shaping Mobutu's strategy to influence his superpower patron.

More broadly, to commentators and policy-makers facing today's crisis in central Africa, the pitfalls of relying on a questionable central authority in the name of stability have been underlined by this thesis. A return to the turbulent 1960s could not be in the interest even of Congo's downtrodden population, so the argument went. This willingness to hide behind a quest for 'stability' is not dissimilar to today's international and donor community's tolerance of the inadequacies of the incumbent Kinshasa government- most recently demonstrated

⁵⁹¹ Thomas J. McCormick, *America's Half-Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War and After*, 2d ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1995); Also, Tony Smith, 'New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War', *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2000); Westad himself, of course, also elaborates this very issue.

in the fraudulent elections of November 2011- in the name of preserving order, even as a largely ineffectual MONUSCO peace-keeping operation permits the continued plunder and exploitation of much of the civilian population beyond the main towns in the Kivus.⁵⁹² It is unlikely that Congo will ever advance beyond the failed and fractured nature of its current state if the international community does not demand greater accountability from the Congolese government. The Cold War example of turning a blind eye to the on going transgressions of the political elite in Kinshasa in the name of a perceived stability illustrates the extreme danger of such a short-sighted approach.

Ultimately, this study has sought to place the American role in Mobutu's Congo in its own specific context. Only by considering the very details driving Washington's approach towards the country for the best part of two decades is it possible to discern the nuances that led to a catastrophic and lasting intervention in Congo. Time and again simply superimposing a broader Cold War vision on its interpretations of events in the central African region, even when very accurate intelligence was available, ensured a remarkable uniformity in the analyses of successive administrations and prevented a more nuanced policy from emerging; alternative voices in Congo were never heard, negotiations with rebel factions never attempted and regional forums remained impotent chalices as the United States continued arming and financing a corrupt dictator who ruled through largess, repression and neglect. Unfortunately, while Washington's foreign policy mission could grind on without connecting the dots of its failings in Congo for its broader goals in Africa and the Cold War, it was the voiceless Congolese population, disenfranchised by the Mobutu coup, that was left to carry the burden of material suffering for these shortcomings.

⁵⁹² See, for example, the Carter Centre's report on the elections and the muted response of much of the international community on its findings.
www.cartercenter.org/news/publications/election_reports.html#drc

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